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BELGIAN MILITARY FORCES IN THE CONGO

VOLUME 2: CONGOLESE TACTICAL AIR FORCE CO-OPERATION WTH THE CIA 1964–67

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOL
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Note: In order to simplify the use of this book, all names, locations and geographic designations are as provided in *The Times World Atlas*, or other traditionally accepted major sources of reference, as of the time of described events. Correspondingly, the term 'Congo' designates the area of the former Belgian colony of the Congo Free State, granted independence as the Democratic Republic of the Congo in June 1960 and in use until 1971 when the country was renamed Republic of Zaire, which, in turn, reverted to Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997, and which remains in use today. As such, Congo is not to be mistaken for the former French colony of Middle Congo (Moyen Congo), officially named the Republic of the Congo on its independence in August 1960, also known as Congo-Brazzaville.

Dedication

To the *Compagnons de l'Ommegang* and the men of the FATAC

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ANC	*Armée Nationale Congolaise* (Congolese National Army)
BAKA	Base Aérienne Kamina
BIAS	Belgian International Air Services
CAMAC	*Commandant de l'Assistance Militaire au Congo* (Military Assistance Command)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNL	*Comité National de Libération* (National Council for Liberation)
EPA	*Ecole de Pilotage Avancé* (EPA) (School of Advanced Flying)
FAC	*Force Aérienne Congolaise* (Congolese Air Force)
FAK	*Force Aérienne Katangaise* (Avikat), Katangese Air Force
FATAC	Congolese Tactical Air Force
RDC	*République démocratique du Congo*
UDéf	*Unité de Défense* (Defence Unit)
USAF	United States Air Force
WIGMO	Western International Ground Maintenance Organisation

Preface

Two volumes published by Helion have previously detailed the events of the Congo Crisis (1960–1967), the titles of these being: *Ripe for Rebellion: Political and Military Insurgency in the Congo, 1946–1964* and *For God and the CIA: Cuban exile forces in the Congo and Beyond, 1959–1967*.

Volume 1 of Helion's two-part series covering the Belgian military forces, has dealt with a period covering the conception of the Congo Free State in 1885, the Congo under the Belgians and the actions of the country's paramilitary forces, the *Force Publique*. Volume 2 continues the story of Belgian military forces in the Congo by focusing on a little-known but significant, intervention by a group that went by the name of the *Force Aérienne Tactique Congolaise*, or in English, the Congolese Tactical Air Force (FATAC). This group was operational in the Congo from 1964 to 1967. The contribution of this group to the history of the Congo crisis, will be unveiled using a series of first-hand accounts provided by veterans of the campaign and historical documentation relating to the period. These accounts are already published in French and in Flemish in a publication entitled *Nous en étions, La FATAC, Force Aérienne Tactique Congolaise, 1964–1967*, a publication produced by the *DAKOTA ASBL Centre de documentation 15 Wing Transport Aérien* and the Belgian Veteran's Association and *Compagnons de l'Ommegang* in 2015. What follows is a version adapted to an English-speaking readership.

For those unfamiliar with the story of the FATAC, it concerns enlisted members of Belgium's 15th Air Transport Wing who were recruited (sometimes against their will) by the Belgian government to serve as flight crew, technicians and other ground crew in the Congo during one of the central African country's most tumultuous periods. Though fully-fledged soldiers of the *Armée Nationale Congolaise* (ANC), the men of the FATAC were not authorised to take part in fighting. They were only given permission to provide logistical assistance to the ground forces of the ANC as well as mercenary groups employed by the Congolese government to suppress Marxist-inspired rebellions supported by radical African nations.

The men of the FATAC were often placed in perilous situations, countless lives were saved using exceptional ingenuity and intrepid devotion to the task of keeping aircraft fit for use. One of the lives the FATAC saved was that of the CIA's Richard Holm. Belgian authorities have never fully recognised FATAC's role in pacifying the Congo or the history of Belgium's military forces. It is hoped this volume will go some way to compensating the lack of recognition and demonstrate the value of the operations to the general wellbeing of the Congolese people from 1964 to 1967. It is dedicated to those who lost their lives during service with the FATAC and during the Ommegang, Operation Dragon Rouge, Operation Dragon Noir and operations against internal threats to Congolese sovereignty. What the reader will discover are eyewitness accounts provided by the men who took part in these operations; an element that takes the aforesaid reader into the heart of the battles fought.

- René Raucroix – killed at Wanie Rukula, 2 August 1964
- Alfons De Wageneer – killed at Stanleyville, 24 November 1964
- Albert Wouters – killed at Stanleyville, 25 November 1964
- Lucien Welvaart – killed at Paulis, 26 November 1964
- Ferdinand Séverin – killed at Stanleyville, 29 November 1964
- Jean Bailleux – killed at Stanleyville, 29 November 1964
- Roger Genis (Ops Nord section of 5th Mechanised Brigade) – killed at Wamba Moke, 9 December 1964
- René Glorieux (Ops Nord section of 5th Mechanised Brigade) – killed at Wamba Moke, 9 December 1964
- Frans Allaeys – killed at Buta, 27 June 1965
- Raymond Bordon – killed at Buta, 27 June 1965
- Robert Jacobs – killed at Buta, 27 June 1965
- Lucien De Maat – killed at Bendera, 17 August 1965
- Joseph Swinnen – killed at Bendera, 17 August 1965

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Additionally, we would like to thank: René Hoeben, Director of the *DAKOTA Centre de Documentation du 15 Wing* and Michel Neyt, Lt.Colonel (Honorary) and Chairman of the *Association Belge des Vétérans et Compagnons de l'Ommegang*.

Introduction

The Historical Context

On 30 June 1960, the newly independent Republic of the Congo-Kinshasa (later Democratic Republic of the Congo) emerged after some 75 years of Belgian rule in the Congo. The road to independence had seen the development of Congolese political parties and the appearance of several leading political lights including Joseph Kasa-Vubu and Patrice Lumumba. As president and prime minister respectively of Africa's latest addition to the list of sovereign nations, the future seemed bright after months of negotiations that witnessed the renewal of tribal antagonism and localised warfare. There remained many questions to be resolved, not least on the question of Katanga, a province that was the Congo's economic powerhouse. Indeed, the province's political leader, Moïse Tshombe was a staunch believer in maintaining ties with Belgium as opposed to Lumumba's pan-Africanist rejection of colonialism. Within two weeks, Tshombe had declared Katanga's secession from the Congo prompting Lumumba to call on the United Nations to bring it back into the fold.

As *Ripe for Rebellion* shows us, Tshombe's employment of mercenaries to fight off threats to the province was to lead to a series of events that saw ANC Chief of Staff, Joseph Mobutu come to the political fore. With the help of the CIA, he organised a military coup d'état that overthrew both Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba in September 1960. Kasa-Vubu was later reinstated as president but Lumumba was less fortunate. His use of Soviet-bloc troops to quell rebellion in the secessionist Kasaï province ultimately led to his assassination in January 1961. Lumumba's supporters did not take Mobutu's overthrow lightly. His deputy prime minister Antoine Gizenga formed a breakaway government supported by the USSR in Stanleyville in late November 1961. The communist-backed *Conseil de Libération Nationale* (CNL) was to pick up Lumumba's political cause using military means in July 1963. Later, in January 1964, two offshoots of the CNL led by Pierre Mulele and a triumvirate comprising Gaston Soumialot, Christophe Gbenye and Laurent-Désiré Kabila went to war with the Congolese army; their aim being to depose the government in Leopoldville (Kinshasa).

1

The Creation of the FATAC

By May 1964, despite significant support for the government of Cyrille Adoula from the US, the inefficiency of the ANC had allowed the different rebel movements to extend their control over large swaths of central and eastern Congo. Such was their momentum, at one point up to three-quarters of the Congo was in rebel hands – a situation that threatened to engulf the Congo. Pierre Mulele's 'Mulelists' and the 'Simba' rebels were both using traditional beliefs such as witchcraft to scare many soldiers of the ANC into either fleeing the fight, laying down their weapons and/or joining the rebel groups. Soumialot's followers had gained control of Uvira in the east where they occupied the Ruzizi Plain and areas around Albertville (Kalemie). From May, they moved towards Lomami and Kindu in the Maniema province before advancing on Ponthierville (Ubundu)[1] and Stanleyville (Kisangani) to the north.

Stanleyville was home to over 1,500 Europeans who had decided to stay in the *République démocratique du Congo* (RDC) – also known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – after its independence. When the anti-government rebels reached Stanleyville in early July 1964, the Europeans and some American consulate officials were used as human shields to avert attacks from pro-government forces.

The structural deficiencies of the ANC had been a matter of concern for Congolese governments since the county's independence. In July 1962, Colonel Michael J. L. Green of the US Army was seconded to the UN to draw up a report presenting proposals for

Pierre Mulele (at the table, seated second from left), Gaston Soumaliot and Christophe Gbenye spearheaded two rebellions in the Congo from 1964. They were joined by Laurent-Désiré Kabila; absent from this photo. (Author's collection)

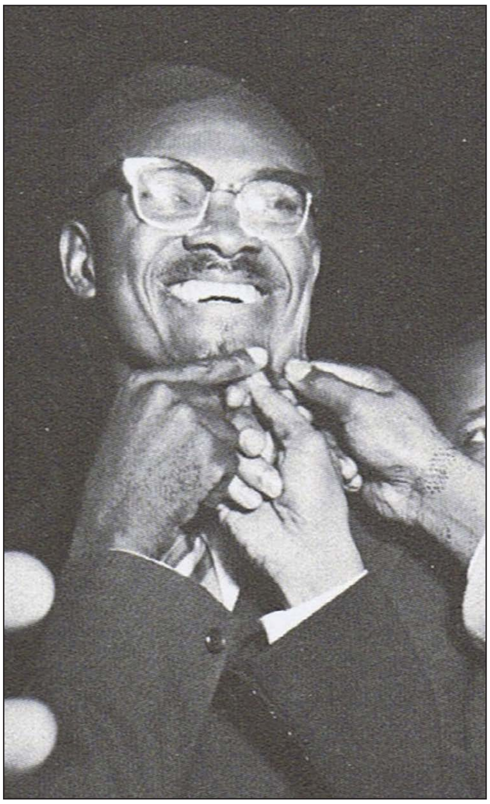
the modernisation and training of the ANC. Greene's mission was taking place at a time when Katangan forces still presented a sizeable threat to the government of Cyrille Adoula.

Therefore, it was decided that the role of the UN would be to coordinate the measures taken by the Congolese government and to create an international technical mission responsible for overseeing military assistance to the ANC's commander-in-chief. As part of an ongoing technical assistance to the Congolese government provided by Belgium since July 1960 – the Belgian Technical Mission (MISTEBEL) – Adoula insisted that 'the Belgian government continue to assist the Congo in terms of equipment, instructors and advisors. In addition, it needed to extend its programme by providing 15 more advisors than the Belgian and Congolese governments considered necessary to help improve the administration and control of army and gendarmerie units'.[2]

On 27 December 1962, U Thant, the UN Secretary General, accepted Adoula's requests and promised he would do everything in his power to provide assistance as soon as possible. However, on 4 February 1963, U Thant noted that any support should be approved by the UN's security council and that the UN alone did not possess the necessary resources for the immense needs of the Congo. The notion the UN could not provide the required financial assistance was evidenced by them deciding to withdraw peacekeeping forces at the end of 1963 for monetary reasons. As the UN was no longer able to coordinate the recommendations of the Green Plan, the Congolese government turned to others. They looked towards Canada to provide training in technical schools, Italy for the training of an air force, Norway for the training of naval personnel, the USA for the supply of material and Belgium for the reorganisation of the ANC's command structure.

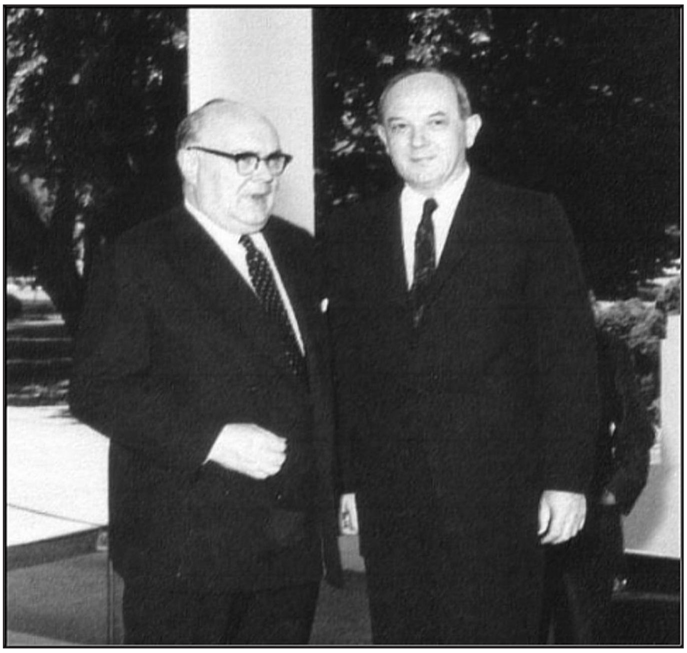
The issue of ANC reform was the subject of discussions between Adoula and Spaak that were held in Brussels towards the end February 1963. Spaak declared that Belgium was prepared to participate in the Green Plan and he sent around 100 officers. As a sign of friendly relations between former coloniser and former colonised, Congolese foreign minister, Justin Bomboko, he also agreed that Belgium should be handed the bulk of the task of reorganising the Congo's armed forces. Due to Belgian control over the administration of the *Force Publique*, Bomboko felt able to say:

> As for Belgium, the Congolese government has entrusted it with the managing of the army staff HQ as well as logistics. Belgium will also be given the mission of reorganising the basic structure of the army, the Congolese gendarmerie and the infantry (including training centres) and the training will be carried out by Belgian technicians. These technicians will be both advisors and instructors, some will perform administrative duties and others will serve alongside Congolese troops.[3]

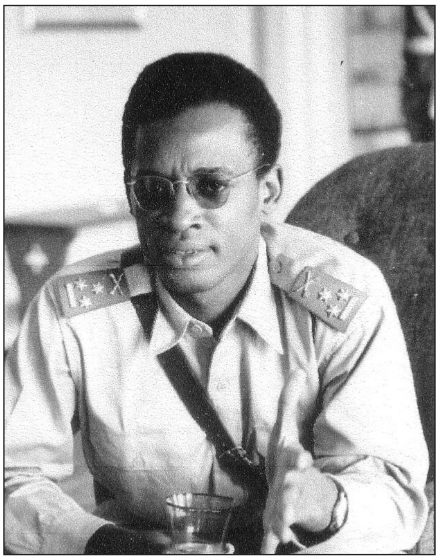


The main objective of the rebellions was to oust the Congolese government and to implement a pan-Africanist ideology expounded by the former prime minister – now assassinated – Patrice Lumumba. (Author's collection)

From then on, Belgian military assistance to the Congo increased significantly. On 29 April 1963, Adoula formalised his request for Belgian assistance, on 20 May Spaak sent Adoula a letter accepting the request and on 21 May, the UN was informed of the recent dispositions. An agreement was quickly drawn up to lay out the conditions and means of Belgian technical military assistance. On 13 June, the defence ministers of Belgium and the Congo (Paul-Willem Segers and Jérôme Anany) held a meeting in Brussels with Mobutu and Colonel Guy Logiest, a Belgian officer



Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak (left) and US Secretary of State Dean Rusk (right). (Author's collection)



The ANC Chief of Staff, Joseph Mobutu, was keen that Belgium supply technical staff and pilots to support air operations from June 1964. (Author's collection)

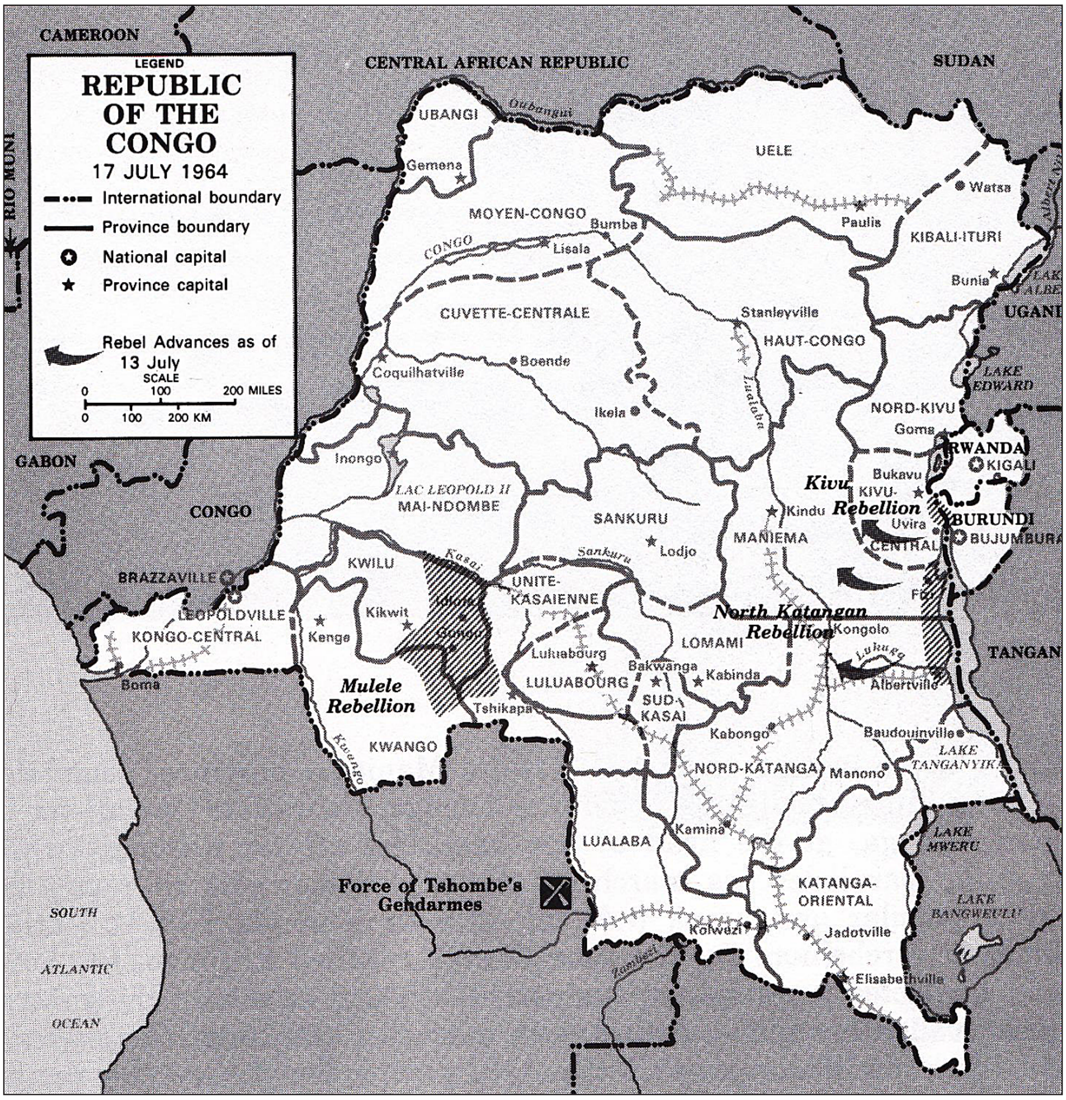
Colonel Guy Logiest served in colonial Rwanda as Belgium's top colonial official. Logiest was involved in many of the negotiations leading to the intervention of the FATAC. (Author's collection)

Mobutu visits the pilot training school in Belgium and meets Congolese students. (Author's collection)

who was still Belgium's highest official representative in Belgian-administered Rwanda. On 17 June, a draft agreement concerning military assistance was sent by Spaak and on 28 June, it was accepted by the Congolese government. The agreement stated that Belgian technicians would serve as members of the ANC but that they were not to be operational commanders.

Logiest was appointed head of the Belgian mission and was tasked with working alongside Congolese authorities to train new Congolese army units and to provide technical, administrative and logistical assistance to the ANC general staff. A programme was drawn up whereby at the end of 1964, 200 Belgian officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO) would be made available to the Congolese authorities. Both sides agreed that the integration of Belgian military personnel into the ANC had to be carried out progressively and gradually so as to prepare ANC troops psychologically.[4] Practical considerations also meant this integration would be a drawn-out procedure. It should be remembered that one of the sparks that ignited the Congo Crisis was the mutiny of *Force Publique* NCOs against their Belgian commanding officers in early July 1960. The rank and file of the ANC therefore had to become reaccustomed to taking orders from Belgians. Hesitancy among both Belgian and Congolese military personnel meant the implementation of the agreement was delayed for several months. Although 275 Belgian officers had requested a transfer to the Congo, once they were informed of the conditions and their status within the ANC, by the end of November 1963 only 86 were still willing to accept the mission.

Pressure from both the Congo and the United States was to accelerate the provision of Belgian military assistance. The CIA were already supplying a clandestine military force of Cuban exile pilots and ground technicians from early December 1962. In July 1963, the United States set up the US Military Mission, Congo (Congo Mission Help, COMISH) to coordinate the activities of the exiles and the delivery of military aircraft and other material to the Congo. At that point, a three-man team headed by Colonel Werngren, was to supply North American T-28 Trojans (Bs, Cs and Ds), Douglas C-47s, Douglas DC-3s and Piasecki H-21s.[5]


LEGEND
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
17 JULY 1964
International boundary
Province boundary
National capital
Province capital
Rebel Advances as of 13 July
SCALE
0 100 200 MILES
0 100 200 KM
CAMEROON
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SUDAN
RIO MUNI
GABON
CONGO
BRAZZAVILLE
UGANDA
RWANDA
BURUNDI
TANGAN
SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
UBANGI
Gemena
Oubangui
UELE
Watsa
Paulis
KIBALI-ITURI
Bunia
MOYEN-CONGO
Bumba
Lisala
CONGO
CUVETTE-CENTRALE
Stanleyville
HAUT-CONGO
Coquilhatville
Boende
Ikela
Lualaba
NORD-KIVU
Goma
LAKE EDWARD
LAKE ALBERT
KIGALI
Bukavu
KIVU-CENTRAL
Uvira
BUJUMBURA
Kivu Rebellion
Inongo
LAC LEOPOLD II MAI-NDOMBE
SANKURU
Lodjo
Kindu
MANIEMA
Kasai
Sankuru
KWILU
UNITE-KASAIENNE
North Katangan Rebellion
Kongolo
LEOPOLDVILLE
KONGO-CENTRAL
Kikwit
Idiofa
Gungu
Kenge
Luluabourg
LULUABOURG
Bakwanga
Kabinda
LOMAMI
Lukuga
Albertville
Boma
Mulele Rebellion
Tshikapa
SUD-KASAI
Kabongo
Baudouinville
LAKE TANGANYIKA
KWANGO
Kwango
NORD-KATANGA
Manono
Kamina
LAKE MWERU
LUALABA
Force of Tshombe's Gendarmes
KATANGA-ORIENTAL
LAKE BANGWEULU
Kolwezi
Jadotville
Zambezi
Elisabethville

By mid-July 1964, the stability of the RDC was under threat from two rebellions in different areas. (Author's collection)

The Kwilu rebellion developed at the very beginning of 1964 and in February, the Belgian ministerial committee for cooperation and development agreed that a budget of some 63 million francs would be used to fund the programme of military assistance.[6]

The maintenance of the aircraft lead to many remaining on the ground and unable to assist the ANC in its fight against rebel forces. At the beginning of April 1964, diplomatic correspondence increased as the foreign ministries of the Congo, Belgium and the United States attempted to remedy the situation by recruiting foreign personnel if necessary. A message sent from the British embassy in Leopoldville on 6 April reported that:

> The recruitment of air crews is proving to be difficult. [Under Secretary for Political Affairs] Harriman has asked Spaak to send Belgian helicopter crews but Colonel Logiest doubts that Belgium can spare them. For the other aircraft, either more ex-Batista Cubans have to be found or a commercial airline company will have to be contacted. For example, an agreement could be made whereby Air Panama and Transair Sweden made their crews available to the Congolese government.[7]

The US embassy in Leopoldville then reported to Washington that:

> [I] Have discussed the use of Belgian crews with Dodds and he informs me that the Italians have never shown the least interest in carrying out operational missions [in the Congo].[8]

On 22 April the following was sent by Belgian deputy minister for foreign affairs Hendrik Fayat to Belgian embassies in Rome, Leopoldville and Washington:

> The Congo has requested that from 10 June four C-47 crews and a number of H-21 crews be sent. If required, these aircraft will be used for the evacuation of foreign nationals after the departure of UN troops. Consequently, will you ask the Italian authorities if they are willing to make crews available to the Congolese government. I would be grateful if you could provide a quick answer and if the Italians refuse, I will be obliged to make arrangements for Belgian crews to assist the ANC. I am informing you that I am sending an operations officer [to the Congo] forthwith and a technical officer specialised in helicopter operations to evaluate the exact number of personnel required. Please coordinate with the US ambassador.

The situation took on a more positive note when Mobutu spent several days in Belgium in April 1964, having already visited London in the hope of garnering military support. On 30 April, a Belgian C-47 of the 15 Wing was sent to collect Mobutu from Royal Air Force (RAF) Northolt. A short time later, he was greeted at Melsbroek by the head of the Belgian general staff, General Wagner and by Lieutenant Colonel Gobin, the commander of 15 Wing.

Over the next two weeks, Mobutu used his time to visit different military training schools including the pilot school at Gossoncourt, where he met several Congolese students.

Mobutu then visited the Royal Training School for Cadets as well as the Royal Institute for International Relations. Most importantly, Mobutu had enquired about the availability of technicians and crews of 15 Wing and of helicopter pilots from Koksijde Air Base for use in the Congo as a tactical air force. Leaving Belgium on 15 May 1964, Mobutu's visit appears to have had a good degree of influence over events taking place on 27 May. Indeed, General Wagner issued the following memo entitled *Special orders relative to military air support of the Kingdom of Belgium to the [Democratic] Republic of the Congo*.

- In principle, air force technicians will volunteer for a three-month renewable period. However, a lack of volunteers will be compensated by compulsory seconding.
- Staff will remain subject to the provisions specific to their status.
- They will carry out their duties under the command of the Congolese government that they pledge to serve faithfully with dedication, integrity and dignity.
- Should they participate in operations, their orders will be transferred through the detachment commander whose role it will be to provide prior evaluation of the feasibility of these orders.
- Personnel are authorised to wear Belgian uniforms and to carry Belgian-issued weapons.[9]

Lieutenant Colonel Andy Decock, as the first commander of the FATAC, was summoned to Brussels on 29 April, where he met the then Colonel Georges Vivario, the secretary to the Minister of Defence. Here, the main tenets of the agreement between the Belgian and Congolese governments were fully presented and it was explained that Belgian troops were to be seconded to the Congo's armed forces as military advisors. However, the use of aircraft by Belgian forces modified this role due to the nature of the intervention. Belgian personnel involved in operations were authorised to carry out transport and reconnaissance missions, to drop paratroops and equipment, to make search and rescue missions and to evacuate those in peril. In no case were the aircraft to be used to provide back-up fire and the weapons carried by personnel were only to be used in self-defence. As for the missions themselves, they were to be designed by the ANC Staff but then transferred to Decock by Lieutenant Colonel Bouzin, the chief advisor to Mobutu. Concluding the meeting, Vivario specified that the captains of aircraft crews could refuse a mission if it was deemed too dangerous. Decock left Brussels for the Congo on 1 June 1964 without written confirmation of these directives. These arrived two months later.

Regarding pay and insurance, much depended on rank and whether the serviceman had already served in the Congo with Belgian forces. A memo issued at the end of May 1964 stated that those who had not previously served in the Congo would receive a bonus paid in Belgian francs based on a coefficient corrector of 1.25. Alternatively, those who had served, would be paid a bonus equivalent to 68.75 percent of their salary when on service in Africa. As for annual allowances for volunteers, it was to be paid by the Congolese government again according to rank. An adjutant was to be paid 110,000 Congolese francs, a senior adjutant 137,000, second lieutenants and lieutenants 165,000, captains 209,000, majors 286,000 and colonels 330,000 Congolese francs. The rate of exchange of the Congolese franc being 150 to one US dollar in March 1964.[10]

The allowance provided to a Belgian colonel assigned to the Congo amounted to some $2,000 paid in addition to the annual salary. The families of Belgian servicemen in the Congo were also to receive supplementary premiums from the Belgian government. Despite these promises, the reality of the situation was that many airmen and their families never received the payments they were promised. Three men of the FATAC describe the issues involving payments.

Robert Feuillen (radio operator):

> The extra payments for wives and children mentioned in the memo were never paid. Regarding the first detachment the officers and NCOs received allowances of 480 and 420 Belgian francs respectively for each day in the Congo but for the second detachment there was an improvement with crews receiving a bonus from the Congolese government. This was a risk premium nicknamed the 'bibbergeld', or the 'wages of fear'. It amounted to 375 Belgian francs per day and a three-month tour in the Congo brought most crewmen 100,000 Belgian francs in extra payments, quite a substantial sum at the time.[11]

Raymond Baccaert (pilot):

> I recall the first meeting of the 15 Wing in relation to the FATAC. Nothing was clear for the crews, so I asked a very specific question. "I have a loan for the construction of my house, so what happens if I have an accident?" To this, the reply from Major A. Blume was that I "go to hell!" I was not alone. Many had taken out insurance cover for similar reasons and they were completely in the dark over what would happen if ever something happened to them in the Congo. Life insurance did not provide cover in the case of death in war or in the case of violence in the Congo. Many left without knowing their positions in regard to life insurance. This and being paid in Congolese francs demotivated us as the local money was worth only a fraction of the Belgian franc.

Emile Janssens (onboard technician):

> In June 1964 it was difficult to recruit men from the 15 Wing who were prepared to go back to the Congo. One of the reasons being that our life insurance did not cover war zones, another was the housing issue. When this issue was raised with the Ministry of Defence, we were told that this was the purpose of the bonus for aircraft accidents.

Recruitment for the FATAC

Lieutenant Colonel Albert Gobin, the commanding officer of the 15 Wing Transport and Communication found that convincing men to take part in the Congolese adventure, was not an easy task. Colonel Albert Laforce, his successor from August 1964, encountered the same problems when it came to recruiting relief parties to replace those already in the Congo. On the other hand, recruiting helicopter pilots from their base in Koksijde proved to be easy. This may be due to the experiences of the 15 Wing in July and August 1960 when many participated in the challenging evacuation of 40,000 Belgian nationals from the Congo. This was when many had first-hand experience of the exactions carried out against Belgians during the mutiny of the *Force Publique*. Thousands of people were affected by the looting, raping and killing that ensued.

Another factor was the memory of 37 Belgian servicemen killed when the C-119 Flying Boxcar in which they were travelling crashed at Sake-Masisi on 19 July 1960. The bodies of the dead were mistreated by locals and survivors were robbed of their possessions.[12] Dying in the Congo being a distinct possibility, it is unsurprising that most volunteers for the Congo were single men who returned for service in the Congo several times between 1964 and 1967.

Directives from the Belgian Ministry of Defence

At the end of July 1964, the Belgian Ministry of Defence issued the following classified memorandum entitled *Instructions from the General Chief of Staff in regard to the operational deployment of the Force Aérienne in the Congo*. Signed by General Wagner, it specified the following:

1. General provisions

- The detachment of the Belgian Air Force based at Kamina Air Base (BAKA) has been made available to the ANC within the framework of Belgian military technical assistance in the Congo. Under no circumstances can its personnel take part in a fire mission in support of the ANC.
- Only personnel seconded to the HQ of the ANC are authorised to take part in the drawing up of plans and mission orders whose objective is to implement fire missions in support of the ANC.
- The Belgian detachment based at BAKA is not responsible for the maintenance of combat aircraft belonging to the ANC.
- In the drawing up of mission orders intended for the Belgian detachment operating DC-3/C-47 and H-21 aircraft, it is for ANC HQ to evaluate if the security measures contained in these directives are respected.
- The detachment commander at BAKA or his delegated officer, remain answerable to the Chief of Staff to ensure the security of the crews. If mission orders do not conform with these instructions given in this memo, or if it is deemed by the commander or his delegate that it is impossible to remain within the bounds of these instructions, permission is granted to temporarily suspend the mission.
- In this case, immediate notification of the reasons why the mission has been suspended will be sent to ANC HQ. It should be made clear that any temporary suspension cannot be for the reason of crew safety only.
- If any disagreement between ANC HQ and the commander of the detachment should appear, the latter will refer to Colonel Logiest who will act according to the powers he has been attributed.
- The evacuation of the Congolese civilian population is the responsibility of the Congolese authorities and potentially for Belgian nationals, following the intervention of Belgian diplomatic staff.
- The detachment commander cannot initiate rescue operations for the personnel of the Force Aérienne Congolaise (FAC).
- To accomplish an airborne transport mission, whatever its nature, it is imperative that, given the local climate, the airfields and landing zones are compatible to the characteristics of the aircraft.
- The Chief of Staff asks that the setting up of airfields and their security, is carried out in accordance with the regulations set out by the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

2. Responsibilities and prerogatives of aircraft commanders

- Whatever the rank of the aircraft commander, he has authority over those aboard in the carrying out of his mission. To ensure that the mission goes according to plan, the passengers, whatever their rank, are required to obey the instructions of the aircraft commander. Under no circumstances should he come under pressure to change the nature of the given mission or interfere with his prerogatives.
- If unforeseen circumstances require that changes to the mission must be made, it is the sole responsibility of the aircraft commander to take the measures to ensure the safety of the aircraft, its crew and its passengers.
- The nature of the load, how the load is positioned and fastened on the aircraft, is the responsibility of the aircraft commander alone.
- The boarding/loading and disembarkation/unloading from the aircraft of personnel/equipment can only be carried out on the orders of the aircraft commander.

3. Special provisions for transport using DC-3/C-47

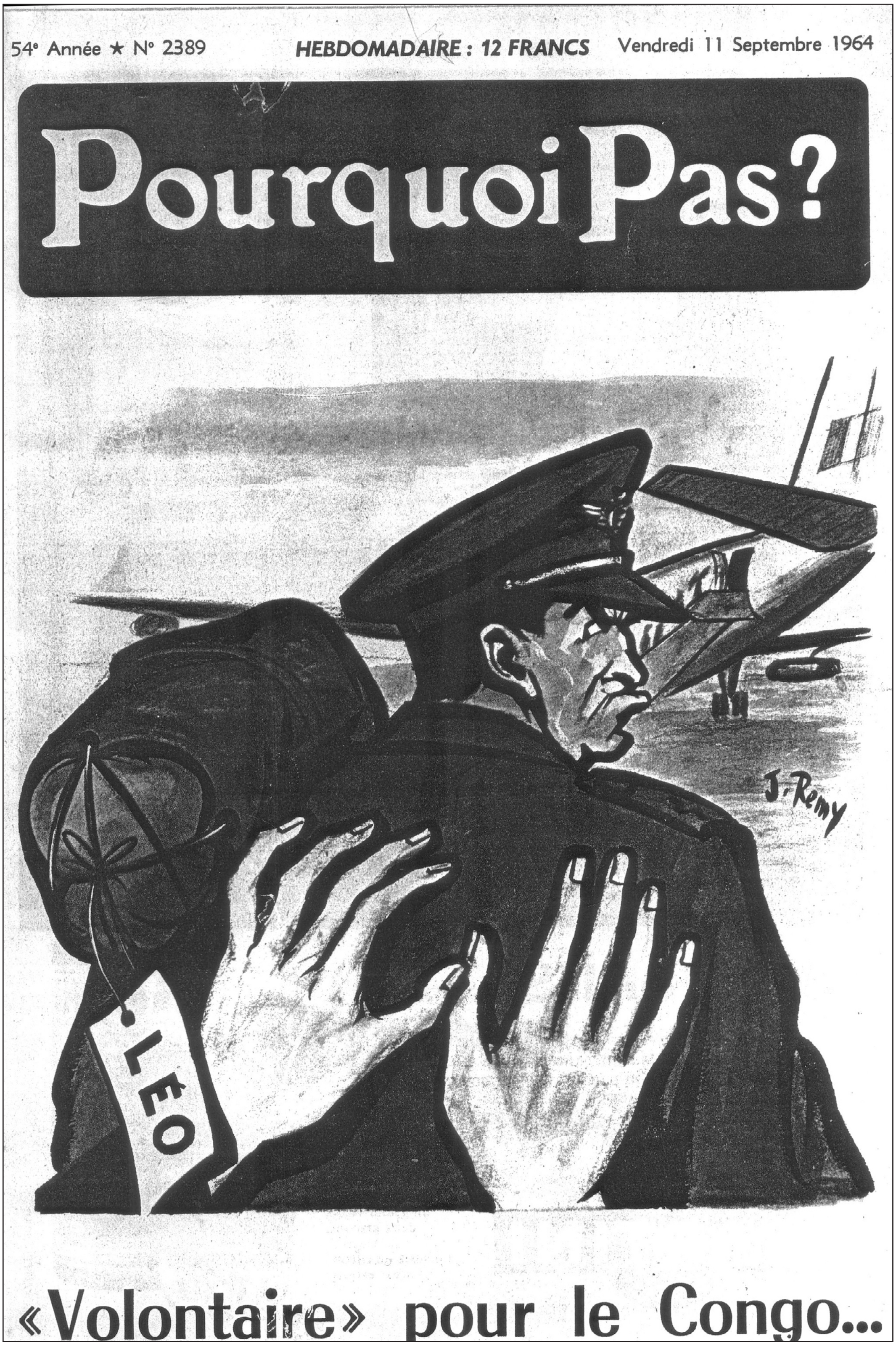
- The transport of military or civilian personnel is authorised under any circumstances providing the safety of the crew is ensured during the approach, the landing, the embarkation, the disembarkation and during take-off.
- The transport of equipment and non-dangerous supplies is authorised in respect to the conditions described above.
- If dangerous or regulated supplies are being transported, the detachment commander of the air force at BAKA will apply the instructions contained in:
- 1) The instructions entitled 'Transport of Munitions' dated 6 September 1963 issued by the Chiefs of Staff of the Belgian Air Force and given to Lieutenant Colonel Bouzin during his visit to Belgium.
- 2) The instructions entitled 'Transport of Regulated Products' issued by Air Congo (in accordance with International Air Transport Association).
- The dropping of paratroopers and/or equipment is authorised when the safety of the crew is ensured either by altitude

Recruiting volunteers for the Congo mission proved difficult as many airmen had witnessed the chaos of July 1960 in the Congo and the evacuation of Belgian citizens. Here, aircraft operated by Sabena line up at N'Djili ready to pick up passengers. (Author's collection) (beyond the reach of the rebels' weaponry), or if the dropping zone is tactically defended.

- Reconnaissance flights are authorised provided they are carried out at an altitude high enough to avoid fire from rebel forces.

4. Special provisions for transport using H-21

- Given the great vulnerability of the helicopter to light weapons, Belgian crews are not authorised to operate over areas where they can be reached by weapons used by rebel forces. Helicopters cannot be used in areas occupied by rebel forces. These restrictions do not apply if rescuing crew members of the FAC.



The fact that airmen were 'volunteering' against their will was satirised in Belgian newspapers of the time. (Author's collection)

BAKA was to serve as the operational base for the FATAC and the decisions on types of operation were taken in Leopoldville. Belgian personnel such as military attaché Colonel E. Momart worked at the Belgian embassy in the capital as an advisor to Ambassador Charles de Kerchove de Denterghem; Colonel Logiest was the head of the Belgian military assistance unit, or *Chef de l'Assistance Militaire au Congo* (CAMAC); Colonel Marlière and Lieutenant Colonel Bouzin were employed as advisors to Mobutu; and former commander of the Katangese gendarmes, Colonel Frédérik Vandewalle, was appointed military advisor to Moïse Tshombe, now prime minister of the RDC and the only man seen as capable of putting an end to the rebellion. Other young Belgian officers were assigned to departments in ANC HQ to act as advisors. This was the case for Lieutenant Jean-Marie Jacquemart who also led the Logistics Department, or D Log, of the FAC. He recalls:

> As a young officer who had graduated from the University of Liège with a degree in aeronautical science, I fitted the role described by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was enlisted into the Belgian Air Force for a two-year period. At the end of August 1964, I left for Leopoldville on a Boeing 707 operated by Sabena. During the trip, I made the acquaintance of several Congo veterans and was given a short briefing on the situation in the Congo. As soon as I stepped off the plane, I was taken back by the oppressive heat and the masses of people trying to flee the country.
>
> At ANC HQ, I was appointed head of logistics for the FAC where my immediate boss was Major Molongya. Here, were

Americans, Israelis, mercenaries and the Italian Detachment for Military Aviation Technical Cooperation (DICTMA) led by Colonel Conti. His team was providing training to the pilots of the FAC on T-6s and was responsible for providing technical support at Ndjili where the training was carried out. Italians could not participate in the fighting per an agreement made with the Congolese government signed in Rome during May 1964.

My first job was to draw up an inventory of all the aircraft at Ndjili and Ndolo. There were aircraft operated by Air Congo, the USAF, the Belgian International Air Service (BIAS),[13] Air Brousse,[14] 21 Squadron of the FAC and the Western International Ground Maintenance Organisation (WIGMO).[15] After this, I handled the reception of American-supplied C-47s and H-21s intended for the FATAC and I was responsible for their maintenance, arming and refuelling.

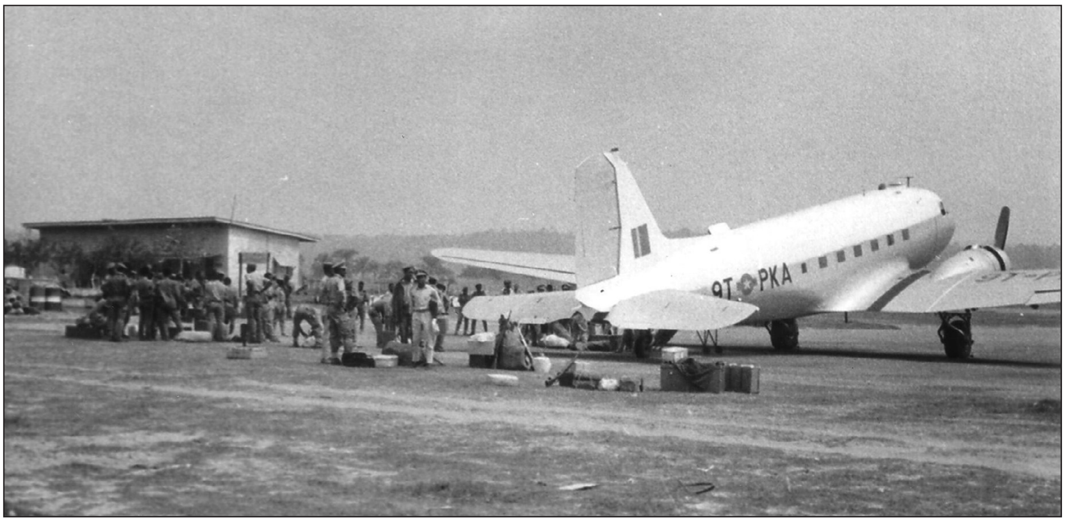
2

The Aircraft of the FATAC

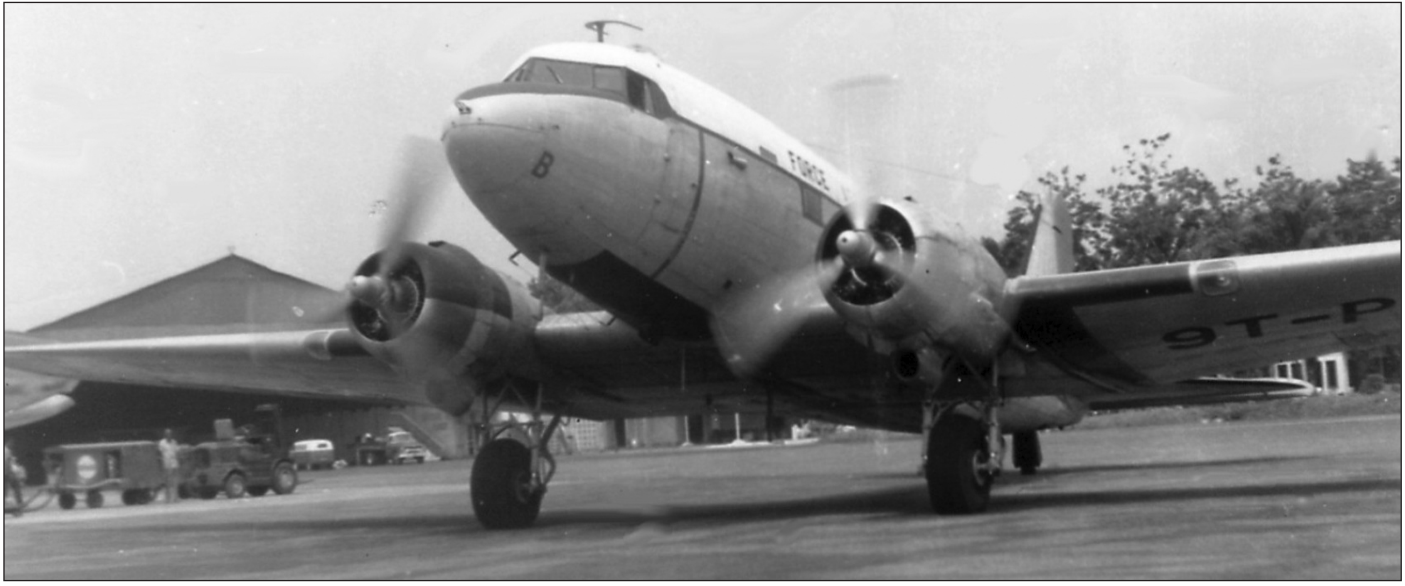
From June 1964, the United States delivered 10 C-47 Skytrains and six Piasecki H-21s to Ndjili in Leopoldville.[1] Portugal also supplied two C-54 Skymasters to the FAC and these were operated by the FATAC from early 1965. The C-47s were first flown to the US airbase at Chateauroux in France where an Inspection and Repair as Necessary control was carried out. They were fitted with extra fuels tanks and made their way to the Congo without stopping. Before being flown to BAKA, the H-21s had been dismantled before transportation to the Congo on a C-124 Globemaster operated by the American Military Air Transport Service (MATS).

The Douglas DC-3/C-47 Skytrain

From June 1942 and at the request of the US Army Air Forces (USAAF), two military versions of the famous Douglas DC-3 were manufactured: the C-47 'Skytrain', which could carry both freight and troops and the C-53 'Skytrooper' for troop transport and parachute drops. During the Second World War, the USAAF had 3,090 C-47/C-53s and the RAF had 1,900 C-47/C-53s that the British called 'Dakota'. Twelve DC-3s of the RAF were of the C-47 type and had a double cabin door along with a reinforced floor for carrying heavy loads.



C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKA. The first C-47 carrying this serial was delivered on 12 June 1964, the second on 31 August 1965. (Author's collection)



C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKB arrived in the RDC in June 1964. It is pictured here at Simi-Simi airfield, Stanleyville (now Kisangani). (Author's collection)

Table 1: Douglas DC-3/C-47 Skytrains

Registration	C/N	Further details
9T-PKA (1)	20,127	Ex 43-15661, delivered to N'Djili 12 June 1964. Suffered irreparable damage 2 October 1964. Used for spare parts.
9T-PKA (2)	19,815	Ex 43-15649, delivered to N'Djili 31 August 1965. Operated by FATAC from May to June 1966, then by FAC from July.
9T-PKB	25,343	Ex 43-48083, flown from Bitburg, Germany to N'Djili via Chateauroux, France in June 1964. Transformed into gunship and armed with .30-calibre machine gun in October 1964. Suffered damage while landing at Watsa in March 1965 and repaired. Transferred to FAC in June 1966.
9T-PKC	14,073	Ex 43-48257, flown to N'Djili via Chateauroux in June 1964. Requisitioned by mercenaries in Stanleyville (Kisangani) in June 1967 and flown to Angola. Piloted by Léon Libert, in 1967 it made a belly landing on the golf course at Bukavu while bringing in supplies and ammunition for Jean Schramme. Destroyed.
9T-PKD	25,242	Ex 43-47981, flown to N'Djili via Chateauroux in June 1964. Hijacked by mercenaries on 11 April 1965 and damaged while landing at Kolwezi. Repaired and returned to service with FATAC in January 1966, then transferred to FAC. Shortly after, it made a forced landing due to lack of fuel between Stanleyville and Buta. Abandoned.
9T-PKE (1)	13,846 (?)	Ex 43–30691 (?), delivered to N'Djili via Chateauroux in June 1964. Seriously damaged while landing at Faradje. Partially used for spare parts and abandoned.
9T-PKE (2)	25,359	Ex 43-48096, transferred from FATAC to FAC in July 1967 and remained in service until 1970.
9T-PKF	25,502	Ex 43-48241, flown from Aviano, Italy to N'Djili via Chateauroux in June 1964. Requisitioned by mercenaries at Stanleyville in June 1967, it was used in missions until crew fled to Rwanda. Transferred to the FAC, the aircraft disappeared over the Atlantic Ocean on 25 May 1971.
9T-PKG	10,066	Ex 42-24204 (?), delivered to N'Djili in June 1964 and transferred from FATAC to FAC in May 1967. Irreparably damaged 8 April 1969.
9T-PKH	9,977 (?)	Ex 42-24115 (?), delivered to N'Djili in 1964 and transferred from FATAC to FAC in September 1966. Shortly after take-off on 27 July 1967, the aircraft crashed in a forest in the Republic of the Congo. The wreck was used as a reference point by local hunters until the early 1990s.
9T-PKI	20,149	Ex 43-15683, delivered to N'Djili in 1964, then transferred to FAC in June 1967. In August 1975, the aircraft was used by Holden Roberto of the National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) during the Angolan civil war. Retired from service in October 1975 and stored at N'Djili.
9T-PKJ	14,071	Ex 43-48255, delivered to N'Djili in early 1965. Served with Air Congo, then transferred to FATAC. Requisitioned by mercenaries in Stanleyville in June 1967. Served with FAC and Zairian Air Force until 1973.
9T-P48/9T-JDM	17,142/ 34,409	Ex 45-1139, delivered to N'Djili May 1963 as a present from John F. Kennedy to Mobutu. Sometimes used by the FATAC, the aircraft was abandoned at Kananga, then sold to Interfret. Put back into flying condition, it served with Lukim Air Services then with Virunga Air Charter. Also registered as 9T-JDM, 9T-MSS and 9Q-CAM.

The type had an empty weight: 8,200kg, varying slightly depending on the equipment of the aircraft, and an operational weight: 8.600kg, equal to the sum of the empty weight, the weight of the fluids (oils, hydraulic liquids, et cetera), the survival equipment and the crew. In short, the operational weight is equal to the take-off weight, minus the weight of the fuel and the payload.

The maximum allowable take-off weight was 13,600kg. This was qual to the operational weight (8,600kg) plus the weight of the payload and fuel. This weight may decrease depending on several factors such as, among others, the length and condition of the runway, the altitude of the airfield or the temperature at the time of take-off.

The C-47 has four fuel tanks (two 200 US gallons and two 202 US gallons) with a total capacity of 804 US gallons or approximately 3,050 litres/2,200kg. When the maximum take-off weight is not limited by other factors, one can theoretically carry, with full tanks, a payload of 13,600 – (8,600 + 2,200) = 2,800kg. In the Congo, this payload could not usually be reached due to the lack of accurate information; correct weather data, runway information and loading information were often unavailable or unreliable. In addition, the aircraft were from the Second World War and the FATAC crews did not have their historical information.

The FATAC adopted its own specifications: 600 US gallons of fuel and 2,000kg of payload, or 800 US gallons and 1,500kg of payload. As a rule of thumb, a consumption of 100 USG/hour (1 USG = 3.8 litres) was considered but often circumstances did not allow the FATAC to stick to these rules. On many occasions, take-offs were made from runways that were barely 800 metres long.

The flaps on the wings could be set in several positions to increase the load capacity and therefore adjust the rate of climb or decrease the landing speed. The flaps also considerably increased resistance during acceleration; the trick was to accelerate without the flaps and if the aircraft was not yet in the air by the end of the runway, to partially extend the flaps. The aircraft would leave the ground but was limited in its initial climb capability. This procedure was not without danger. If one of the two engines failed, the aircraft would become uncontrollable and would inevitably crash. Most of the airfields were in the bush and surrounded by tall trees. The slightest incident with one of the two engines would inevitably end in disaster.

Fuel consumption during the flight depended on the power demanded but in cruise flight it averaged just under 100 USG per hour. With full tanks, one could easily undertake a six-hour flight

C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKC arrived in the RDC in June 1964. During the so-called 'Mercenary Revolt' of 1967, it was captured by mercenaries and its pilot forced to fly to Angola. It is pictured here at Bambili. (Author's collection)

The first C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota carrying the registration number 9T-PKE arrived in the RDC in June 1964. Seriously damaged while landing, it was replaced in August 1965. Pictured here with its crew of the FATAC. (Cruysmans via Belgian Wings)

with a comfortable two-hour reserve. At an indicated speed of 135 knots at 3,000 metres, which corresponds to an actual speed of 155 knots or 285km/h, the C-47 could cover 1,700km. This was sufficient to perform even the longest flights in the vastness of the Congo.

The Douglas DC-4/C-54 Skymaster

After the DC-3, the Douglas Aircraft Company built a four-engine transport aircraft: the DC-4. A military version was developed for the US Air Force: the C-54 'Skymaster'. Four aircraft of this type were put into service with the FAC, two of which were regularly flown by a FATAC crew.

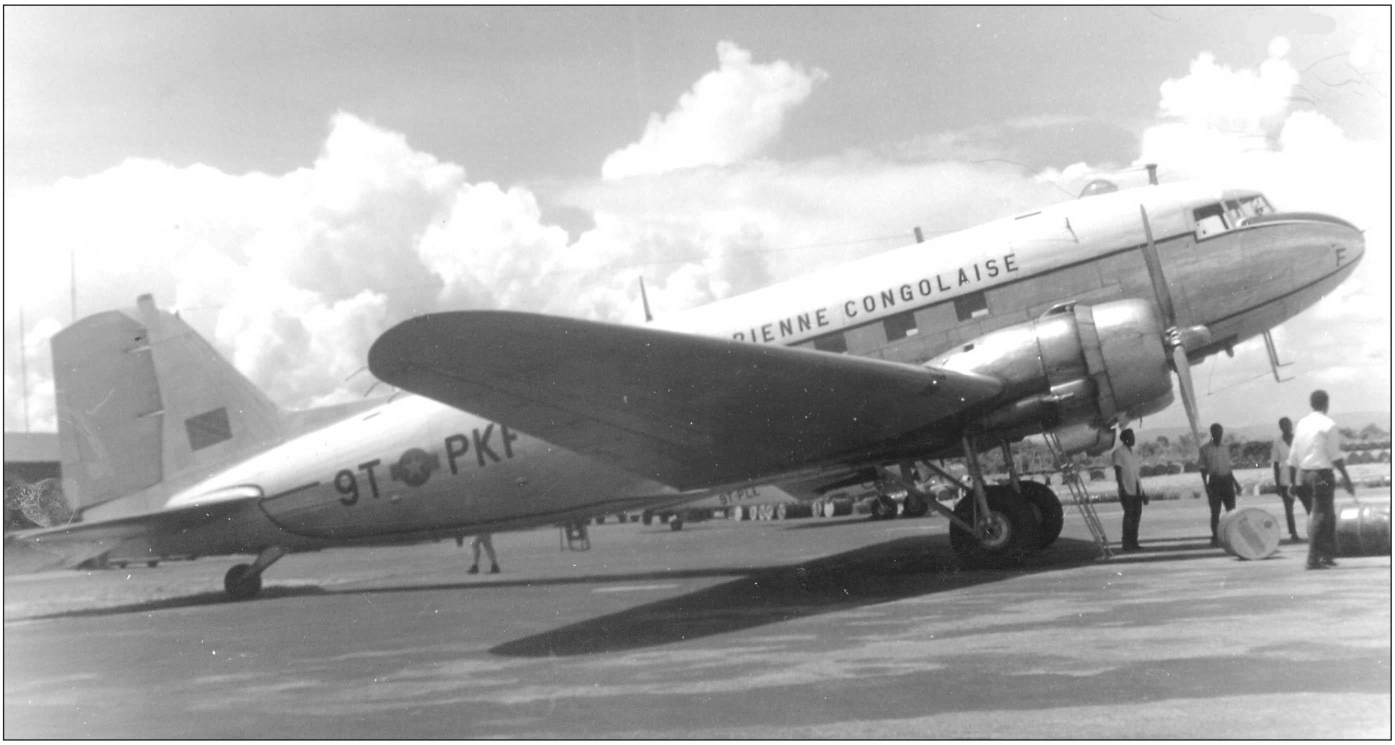
Table 2: Douglas DC-4/C-54 Skymasters

9T-THY	10,612	Ex 42-72507, delivered to N'Djili on 30 January 1965 after several years' service with USAF and Portuguese Air Force (FAP). Used alternatively by FATAC and FAC from 10 February 1965, then by FAC from 1967. Retired from service in 1975 and scrapped.
9T-THZ	10,446	Ex 42-72341, delivered to N'Djili in February 1965 after service with USAF and FAP. Used alternatively by FATAC and FAC and transferred permanently to FAC in 1967. Seriously damaged in 1974 and scrapped.

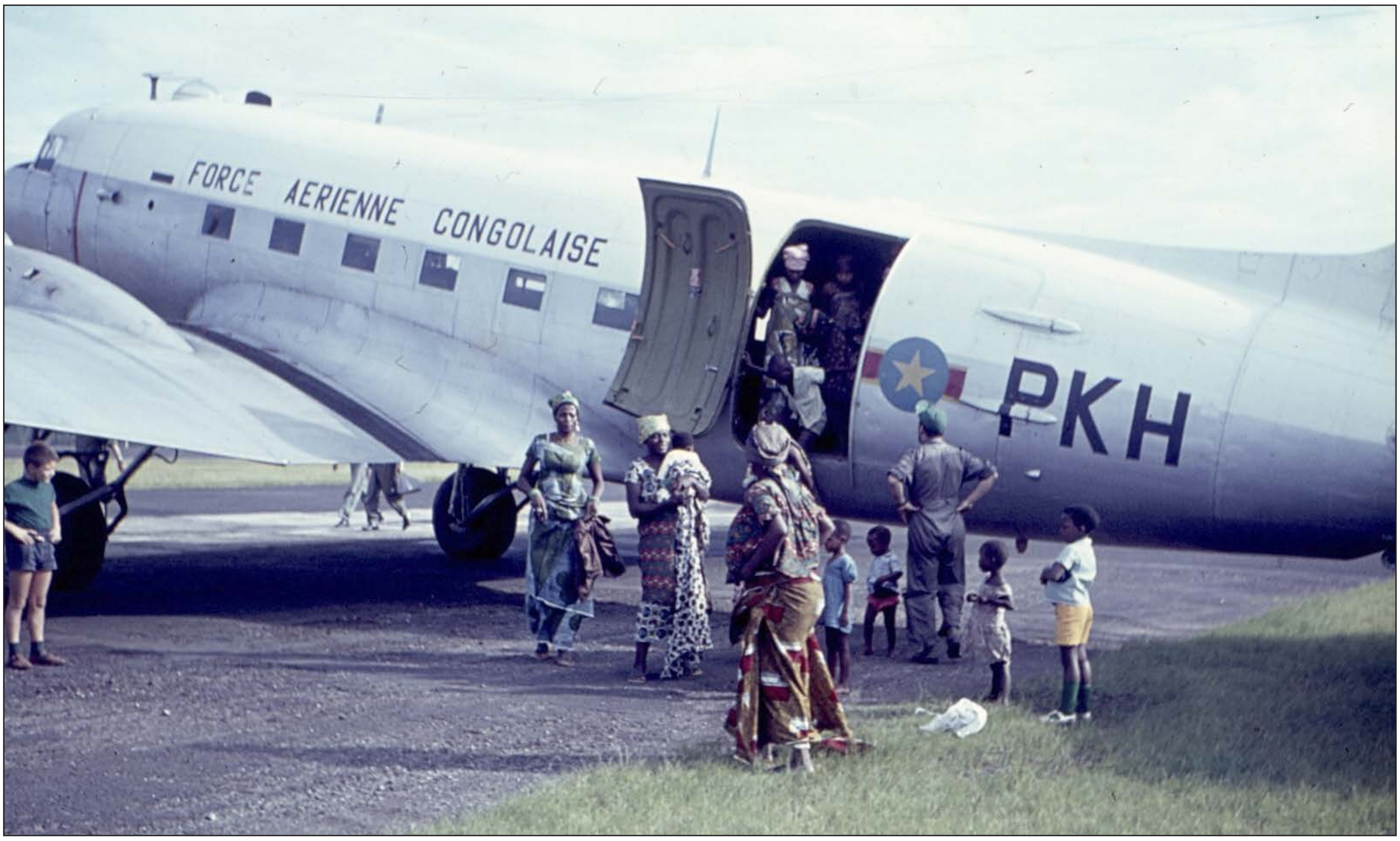
The empty weight of the Douglas DC-4/C-54 Skymaster was 19,700kg, varying depending on the aircraft's equipment, with an operational weight of 20,300kg, equal to the empty weight increased by the equipment necessary for the flight of the aircraft, such as the crew, the catering, the survival equipment. This operational weight is therefore equal to the weight at take-off, minus the payload (cargo and passengers) and the fuel on board.

The maximum authorised weight at take-off was 33,000kg. This is the weight that cannot be exceeded during take-off. Often it is necessary to take off with a lower weight due to local circumstances such as the altitude of the airfield, the length and condition of the runways, the temperature.

The maximum allowed weight without fuel was 27,500kg and determines the optimal load. If the maximum allowed weight without fuel is exceeded, the load must necessarily consist of fuel



C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKF arrived in the RDC via Aviano, Italy in June 1964. Similar to the 9T-PKC, it was requisitioned by mercenaries in 1967. It is pictured here at Albertville. ((Author's collection)



C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKH was delivered to the RDC in June 1964. After service with the FATAC, it finished its life abandoned in the forests of the Republic of the Congo. (Author's collection)

stored in the wing tanks, to reduce their overload. The optimal load is therefore determined by the difference between the maximum allowable weight without fuel and the operational weight.

The maximum allowed landing weight was 29,000kg. In order not to overload the landing gear, an aircraft must have a maximum landing weight. This must be considered when the flight is very short. In this case, the take-off weight cannot exceed the maximum landing weight plus the fuel required for the flight. For the same reasons, a DC-4 is equipped with a system to evacuate the fuel (the fuel dump) when a technical incident in flight requires an emergency landing.

The maximum fuel capacity was 13,500 litres. This maximum fuel capacity corresponds to a weight of 9,700kg. The DC-4 was developed for intercontinental flights. The fuel is stored in eight tanks which are mounted in the wings. With a full load of fuel and a cruising speed of 340km/h, the aircraft can cover 4,300km safely

C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKI was delivered to the RDC in June 1964. After service with the FATAC, it was later used in Angola by the US-backed Holden Roberto of the FNLA. (Author's collection)

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAIS
PKJ

C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-PKJ was delivered to the RDC in early 1965. It was another C-47 requisitioned by mercenaries in 1967. Pictured here with its FATAC crew and soldiers of the ANC. (Author's collection)

Table 3: Vertol-Piasecki H-21 Workhorse/Shawnees

FG-869	B.16	Ex 51-15869, in service from October 1964, it was retired in January 1965 after suffering damage to fuselage caused by rotor blades while landing at Paulis. Transferred by a USAF C-130 to BAKA and sold to a scrap merchant in Kamina.
FG-322	B.72	Ex 53-4322 entered service June 1964 and damaged at Wamba on 10 February after rotor blades hit trees. Partially used for spare parts and destroyed.
FG-677	B.40	Ex 52-8677 entered service July 1964 and seriously damaged on 26 February 1965 during rescue of the CIA's Dick Holm at Bitma. Abandoned.
FG-697	B.59	Ex 52-8697 entered service July 1964 and seriously damaged on take-off at Bunia. Abandoned.
FG-673	B.36	Ex 52-8673 entered service January 1965. Fired on by rebel forces during a rescue operation, it was seriously damaged after take-off between Aketi and Titule. Abandoned.
FG-378	B.128	Ex 53-4378 entered service July 1964 and lost contact on 27 June 1965 between Stanleyville and Buta during humanitarian mission. Wreckage found 3 December 2010 but the bodies of the victims were not located.

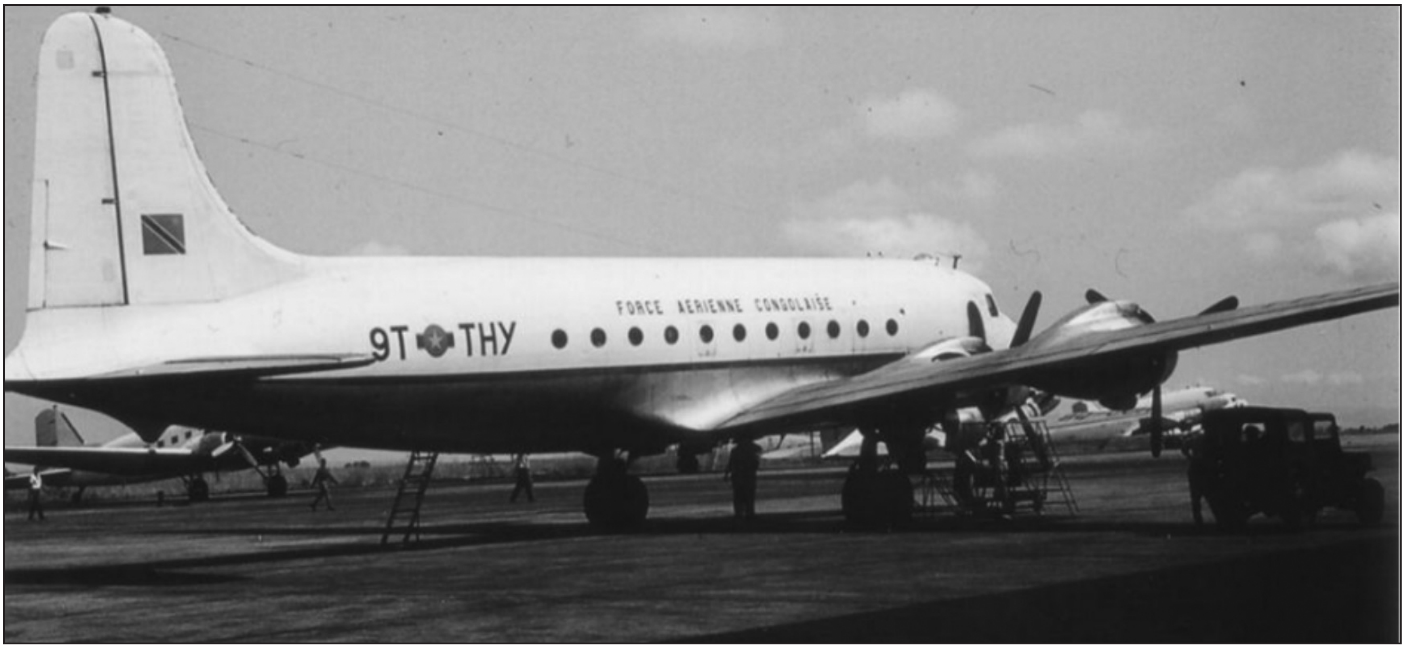
and still have enough fuel to divert to a nearby airfield.

The Vertol-Piasecki H-21 Workhorse/Shawnee

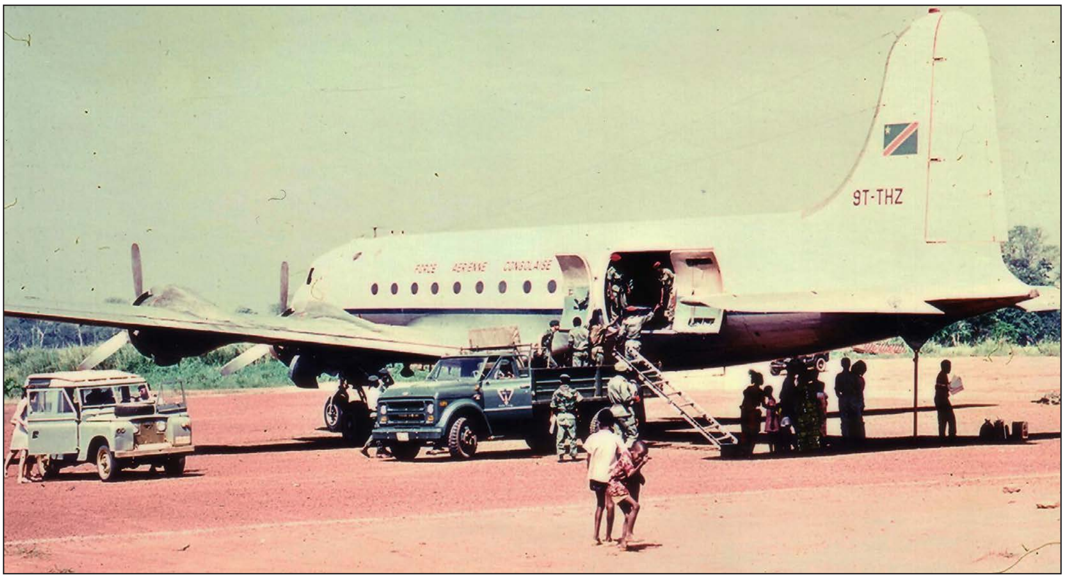
The crew consisted of two pilots and a flight engineer but the crew could be supplemented according to the missions.

The aircraft had the following characteristics: empty weight 3,630kg, maximum weight at take-off 6,670kg, cruising speed 210km/h, maximum flight altitude 2,360 m and a range of 640km. The engine was a Wright R-1820-130 Cyclone radial engine. It had a star engine with a displacement of 29.82 litres and could develop a maximum power of 1,063 kW under normal circumstances. The H-21 was equipped with two rotors rotating in opposite directions to counteract mutual coupling and for this reason it was not well suited to operations in the Congo. Indeed, the engine did not develop enough power to take off with a maximum load and because of the high temperatures and the altitude of the terrain, the engines could not develop their full capacity.

As the weight of the load was difficult to control in the Congo, especially during evacuations, the CH-21 was often heavily overloaded. In



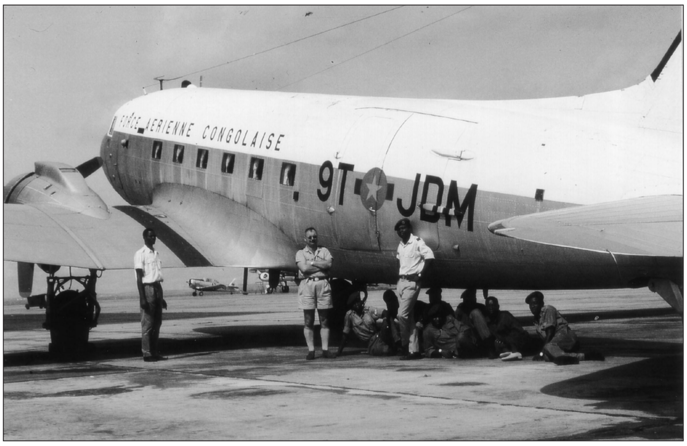
This Douglas C-54 Skymaster registered 9T-THY arrived in the RDC in January 1965. The military counterpart of the DC-4, it acted as a transporter for the USAF and the FAP. (Author's collection)



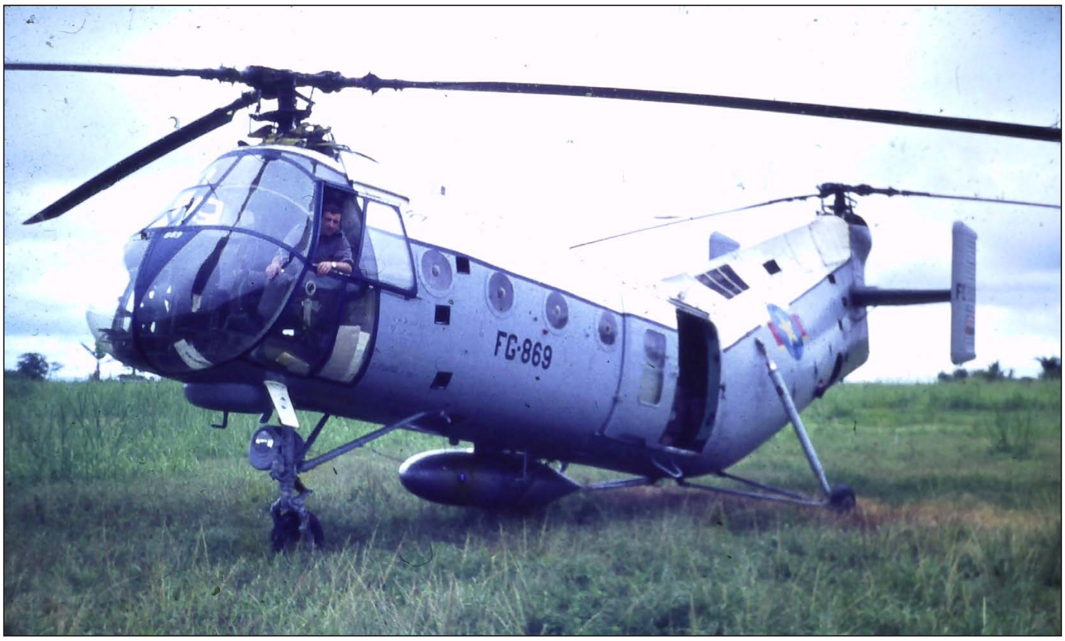
This Douglas C-54 Skymaster registered 9T-THZ was delivered to the FATAC in February 1965. Also having seen service with the USAF and the FAP, it was scrapped in 1974. (Author's collection)

this case it was impossible to take off in the traditional way, so the crew had to use a trick. Instead of taking off vertically, they would roll by accelerating on the ground. With the help of the stick, they brought the rotor surface into an inclined position and as a result, the lift had both a vertical and horizontal component. Thanks to this horizontal component, the helicopter could then accelerate. On the other hand, the wind generated by this acceleration increased the load capacity in the rotor blades and when this capacity was sufficient for take-off, the main landing gear left the ground. Often, the pilot would still hold the nose gear on the ground and thus accelerate a little to get more lift. Sometimes it was necessary to have a little more power by exceeding the maximum capacity allowed, at the expense of the life of the engines. The heavier the helicopter was, the more it had to accelerate. Thanks to this process, it was possible to leave the ground, even in overload.

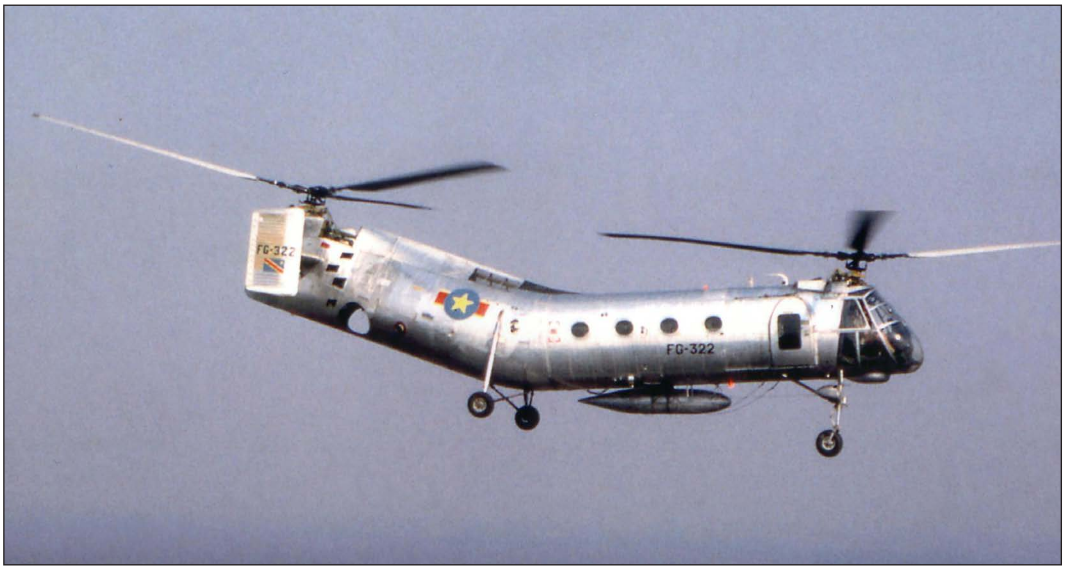
When the aircraft left the ground, another problem appeared. If the climb angle was too steep to clear an obstacle, the wind displaced by the front rotor interfered with the wind displaced by the rear rotor, so that the load capacity of the rear rotor was partially reduced. To get out of this situation, the pilot turned rapidly on an axis of 90 degrees, so the two rotors were in parallel in the axis of ascent and there was no more interference. Thanks to this procedure, it was possible to execute missions with the H-21 that under normal circumstances could not have been executed with this aircraft.



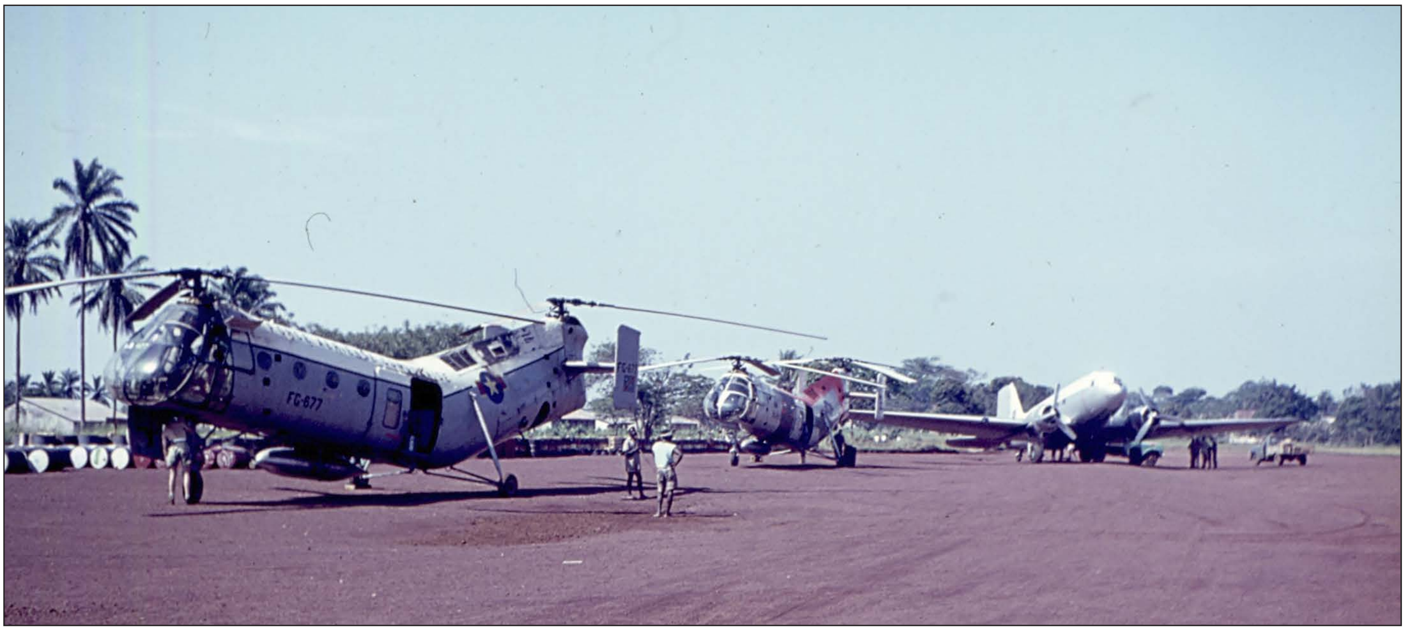
C-47 Skytrain/DC-3 Dakota registration number 9T-P48/9T-JDM arrived in the RDC in May 1963. Presented by John F. Kennedy to Mobutu, it was converted to a VC-47 with a VIP interior. The last ever C-47 built, it was shredded in the Congo in 2019. (Author's collection)



This Vertol-Piasecki H-21 registered FG-869 was delivered by the USAF to the FATAC in October 1964 and was retired in early 1965. (Author's collection)



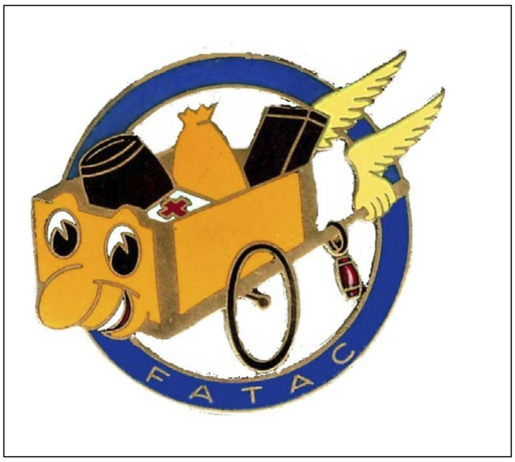
FG-322 was part of the first batch of H-21s delivered by the USAF to the FATAC. The Belgian crews of the H-21s were trained on its use by US airmen. US pilots employed by the CIA front company Intermountain, trained the Cubans on the FAC on T-28s. (Author's collection)



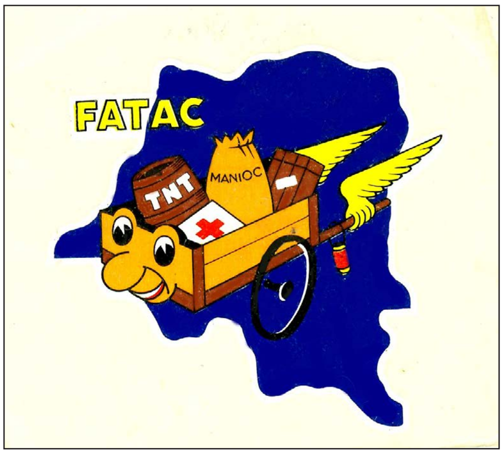
FG-677 arrived in the RDC in July 1965. In February 1965 it was used in the rescue of the CIA's Dick Holm. (Author's collection)

Aircraft Markings

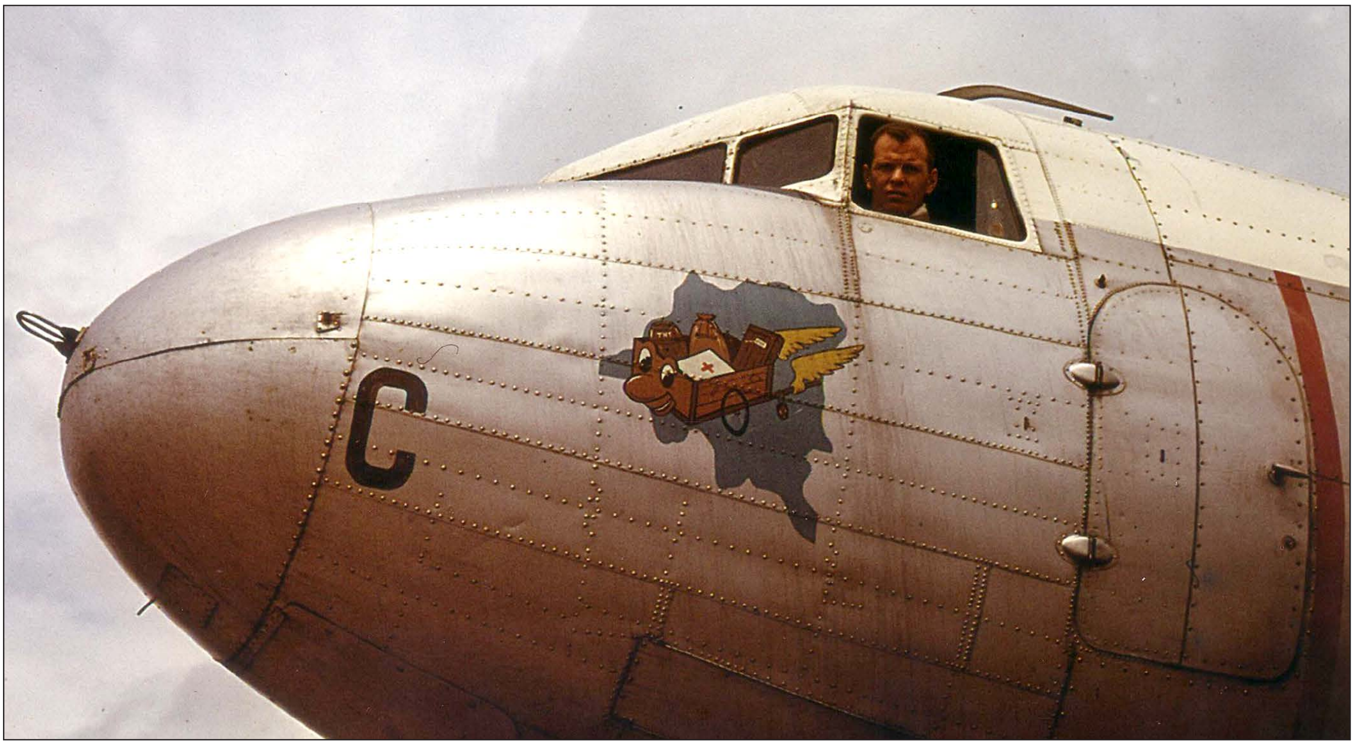
The Department of National Defence took no initiative to create markings for the aircraft of the FATAC. Instead, it was a young warrant officer named Hubert Sermon who, on arrival in Kamina, took it upon himself to design markings he believed captured the objectives of the mission while adding a humorous touch. As shown below, the markings featured a wheelbarrow loaded with explosives, food, medical equipment and other items. One version of the markings was to be worn as a round badge on uniforms and showed a wheelbarrow. A second one appearing on airplanes and helicopters presented the same wheelbarrow backed by a map of the Congo. These markings only appeared on a small number of aircraft.



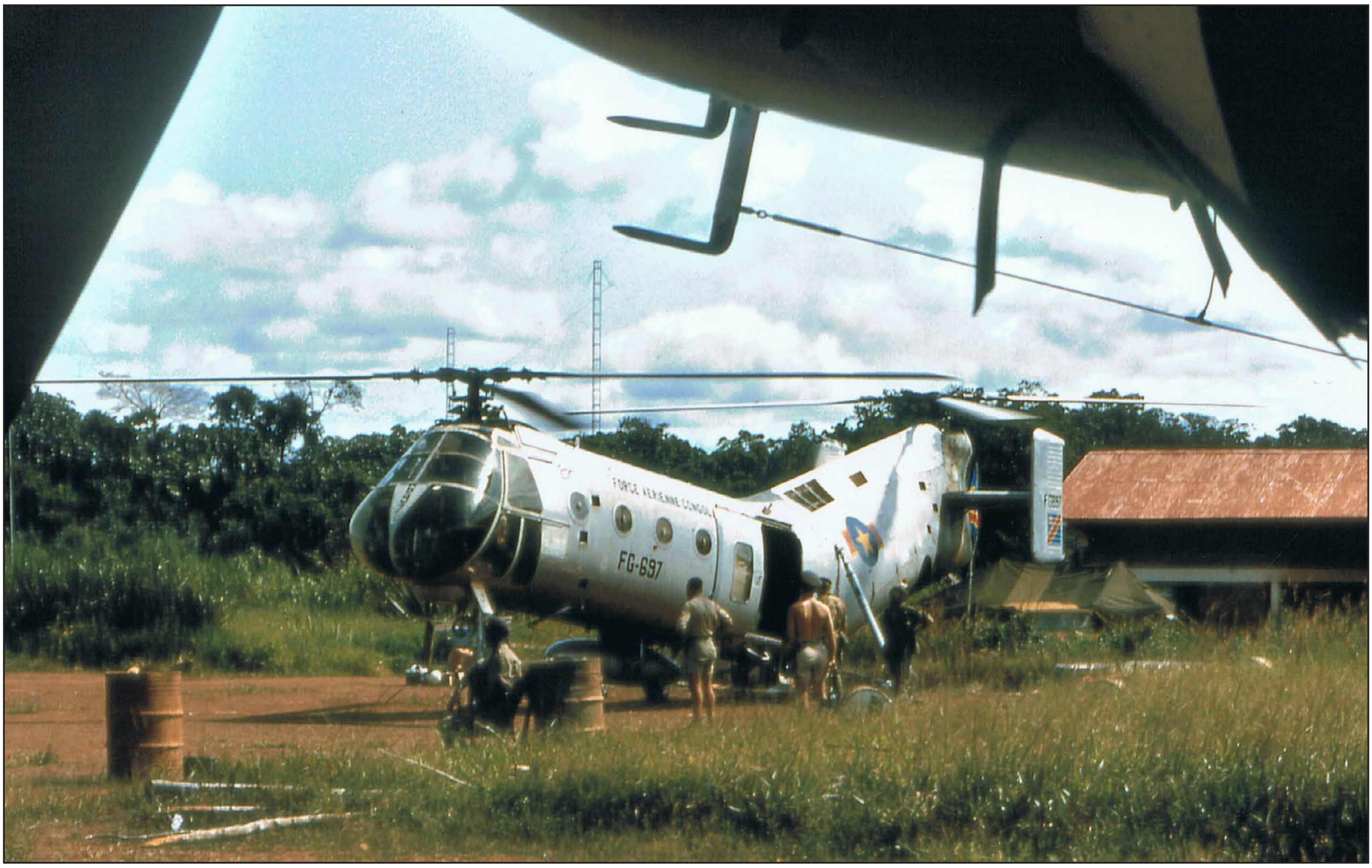
An improvised FATAC insignia worn as a uniform patch. (Author's collection)



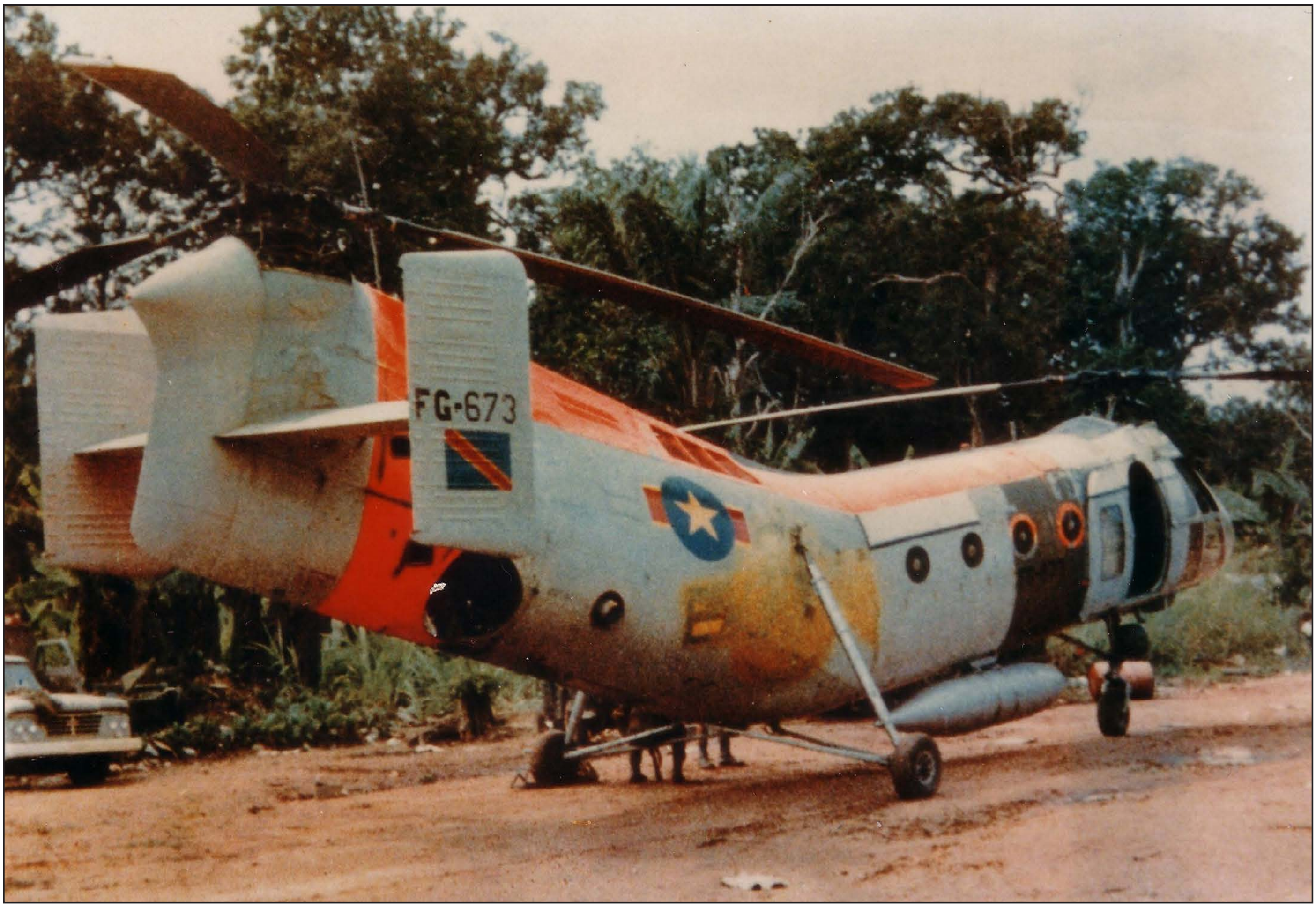
The same insignia as applied to some aircraft. (Author's collection)



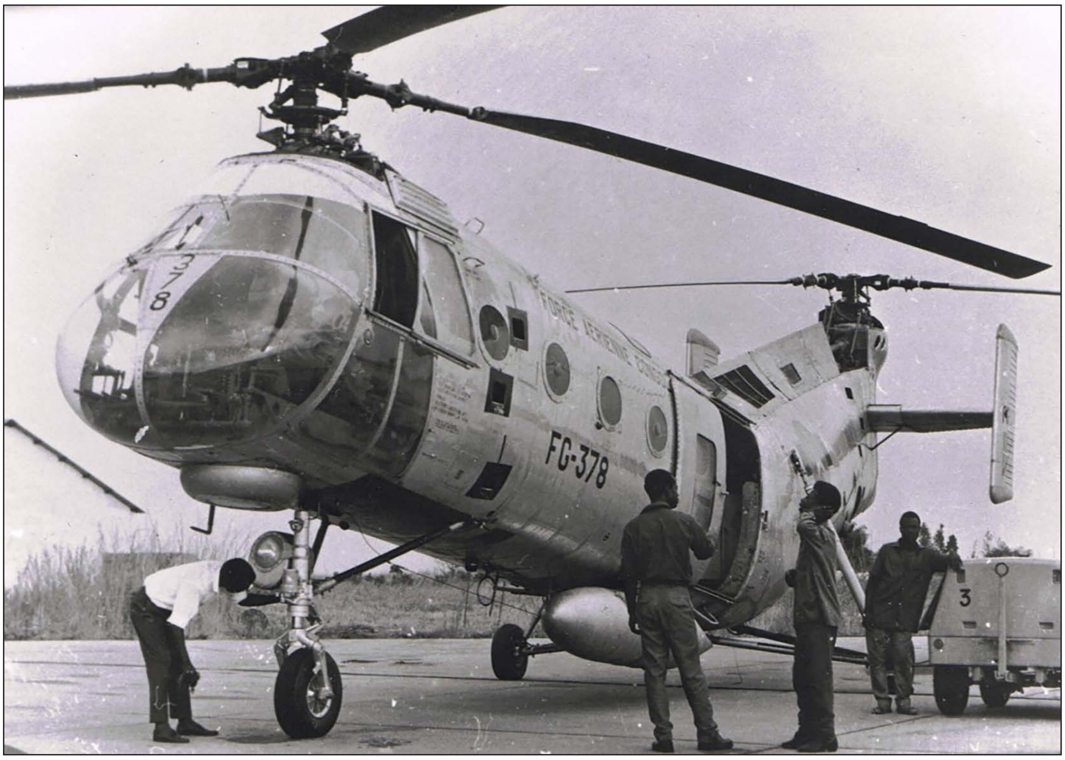
This C-47 photographed in 1967 bears the markings of the FATAC. (Author's collection)


FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAISE
FG-697

FG-697 was another H-21 delivered in July 1964, a time when the Simba rebellion was reaching its height. (Author's collection)



FG-673 was damaged and abandoned after being fired on by the Simba in January 1965. (Author's collection)



FG-378 was delivered in July 1964. It disappeared in June 1965 but its wreck was relocated in 2010. (Author's collection)

3

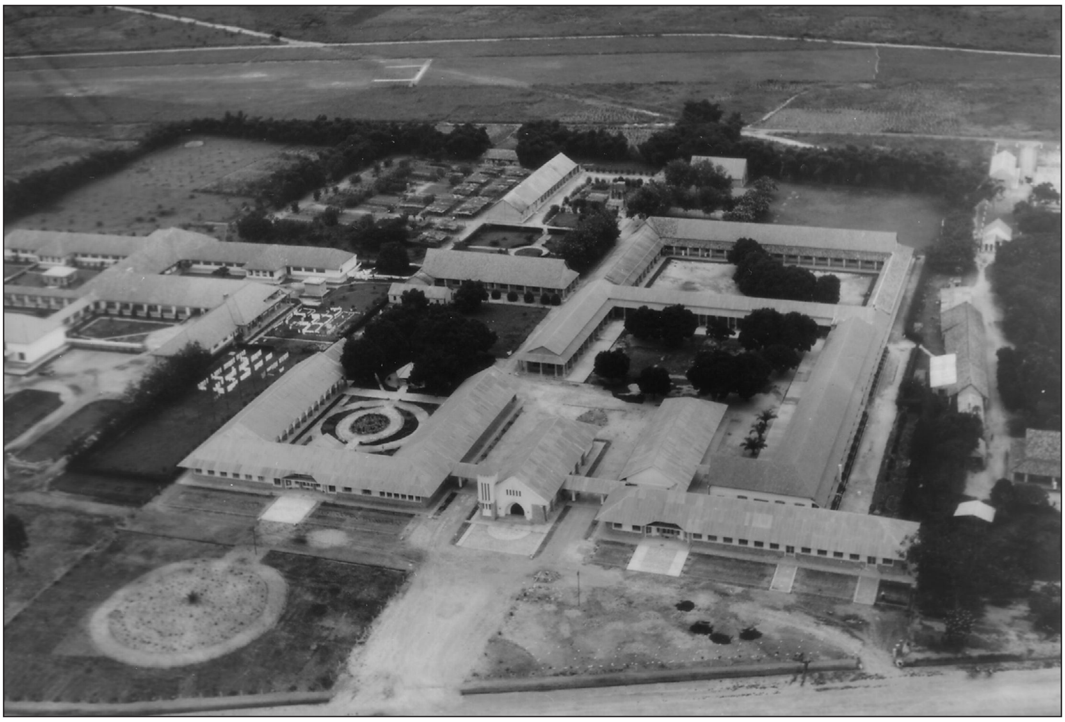
BAKA – the FATAC's Operational Base

After two world wars in the space of 30 years, plus the beginning of the Cold War, European governments looked at the lessons of the past and took measures to prepare for the future. Africa was seen as the new battleground between east and west as any potential global conflict between Warsaw Pact countries and those aligned to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), were limited to Europe and Asia.

As for the Belgian authorities, they understood that control over the mineral-rich Katanga would be a prize worth fighting for given its deposits of uranium-235. This isotope was mined at Shinkolobwe and used in the building of 'Little Boy' and 'Fat Man', the nicknames of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If Belgian military presence was to be extended in the Congo through the construction of an air base, then Katanga appeared the most logical choice amongst several sites that were surveyed just after the Second World War. Besides, the Belgian government was actively seeking to establish a base where its airmen could be trained and where they could take refuge if ever Belgium was threatened by war.

The first surveys were carried out aboard a DC-3 Dakota and a Stampe-Vertongen SV-4, then using jeeps and on foot. The Kamina-Luputa plateau was chosen as it covered an area of 120 square

King Baudouin visits BAKA in 1955. (Author's collection)



An aerial view of BAKA. (Author's collection)

The aerial view gives an idea of the size of BAKA. (Author's collection)

kilometres and situated at an altitude of 1,100 metres. Moreover, it was found on the road between Luluabourg (Kananga) and Elisabethville (Lubumbashi) and was close to a railway junction sprouting out towards the towns and cities of Kamina, Kabalo, Albertville, Kindu. It also provided rail access to Port-Francqui (now Ilebo), a town situated on the Kasaï River, one of the RDC's main tributaries.

Major Emile Janssens of the *Force Publique,* led a team who were among the first sent to survey the area in 1948.[1] After starting a bloody mutiny, Janssens returned to Kamina on 28 January 1949 with a team consisting of six officers, six NCOs and cartographers. Its role was to map out the rocky terrain and prepare for the construction of an air base plus the roads that would provide access. The manpower for the immense building project was recruited locally with the first job to set up temporary accommodation and sheds for earthmoving equipment, vehicles and tools. A quarry was opened, stocks of construction materials were built up and tracks were laid out to connect the base to the existing road and rail network.

Janssens' team had five years to complete this ambitious project. The ultramodern base had to be big enough for use by both the air force and ground forces as well as the largest transport aircraft of the time. It was projected that 1,500 troops would be stationed at Kamina and the plans included the building of general staff offices, a communications centre and a separate logistics centre. Naturally, consideration was given to the more practical needs of those based in Kamina. Therefore, as well as the workshops, sawmills and warehouses to build, repair and construct, there were bakeries butchers, laundry houses, blacksmiths and several other shops and services necessary to daily life. Additionally, medical and spiritual considerations were taken care of with a hospital and nuns from the order of the sisters of Mary of Pittem. They worked alongside ammunition depots, firing ranges, a hydroelectric power station, a drinking water collection station and a farm for the supply of fresh food.

As for housing, three large estates were constructed. One was for Africans and two for Europeans and another housing complex of 2,000 houses was built 10 kilometres away. This complex had two elementary schools and a medical centre while the accommodation for air force personnel was built in nearby Lumwe. Like the complex for ground force personnel, there was an NCOs' mess, an officers' mess, a cinema, police station, sports centre, post office and a swimming pool. Later, a technical school was added where Congolese could be trained as aircraft technicians and the Belgian School of Advanced Flying moved from Brustem to Kamina.

The work programmed for 1949 proceeded according to plan and 20 vehicles plus 22 pieces of engineering equipment were transported by road or by rail to Kamina. An elementary school

An aerial view of the runways at BAKA. (Author's collection)

An aerial view of staff accommodation at BAKA. (Author's collection)

and a dispensary for Congolese children opened their doors in quick succession and the Lumwe airfield also began to take shape. A temporary 1,500-metre dirt runway was inaugurated in December while the first DC-3 Dakota from Belgium made its landing on the air strip on 15 January 1950. At this point, the base was simply a huge building site with staff housed in aluminium barracks covered with a thatched roof.

In 1950, an official deed was signed by which the colony ceded a 50,000-hectare plot of land to the National Defence to build the base. A second elementary school for Congolese children was opened and the technical school was inaugurated in temporary buildings with thatched roofs. The temporary runway was extended to 1,800 metres and the first DC-4 landed on December 20. At the end of 1950, the number of personnel was 225 Europeans, including 150 women and children and 4,000 Congolese including 3,000 women and children. Both white and black people were still housed in temporary dwellings made of dried mud bricks and thatched roofs.

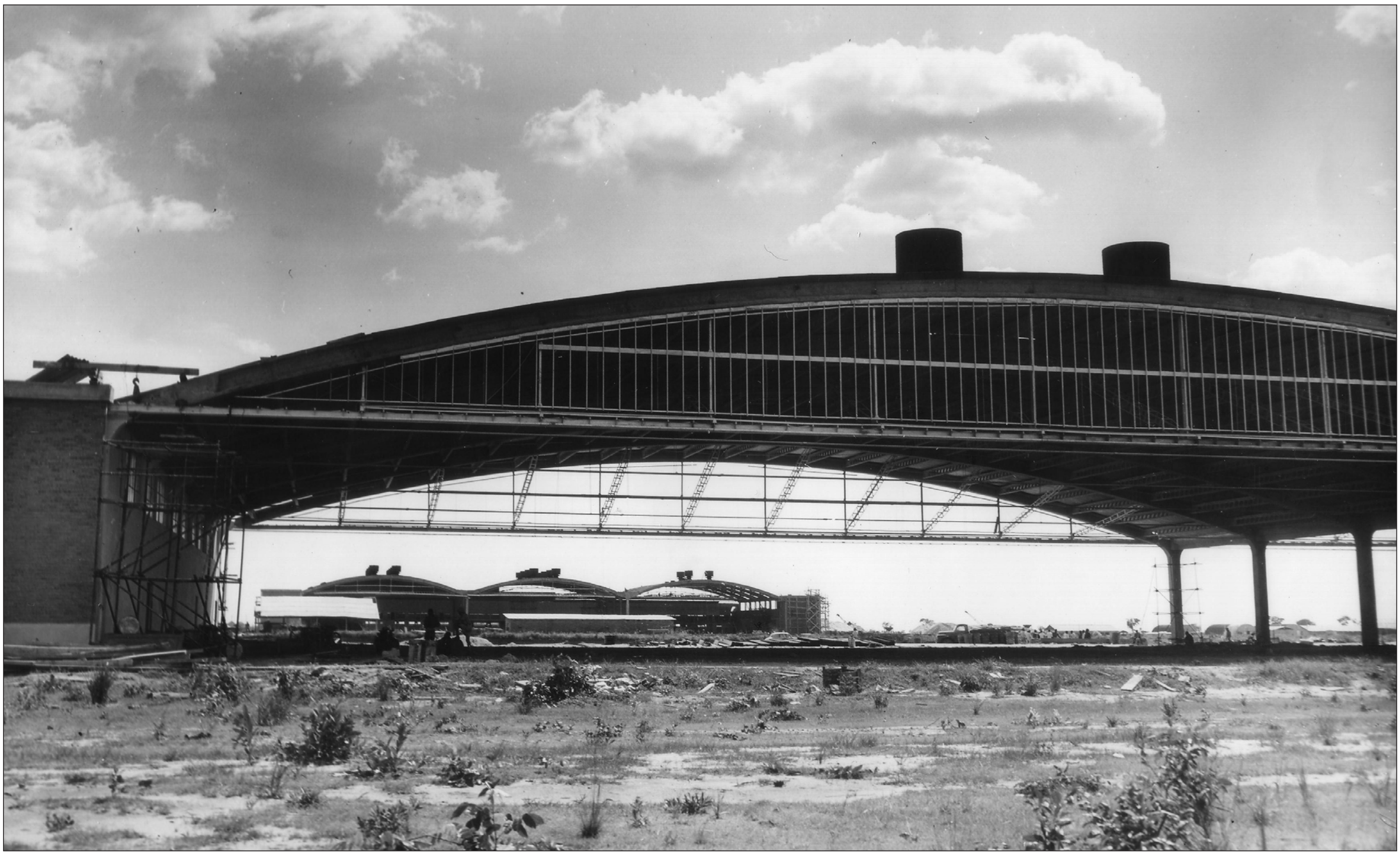
In January 1951, work began on the construction of a hydroelectric power station on the Kilubi River, located 70km north of the base. This 10,400 kVA power station would bring electricity to the base via a 70,000-volt line. Construction was also underway on three housing areas, the convent, the logistics complex, the EPA, the technical school and the building for telephone and telegraph links with the Kamina-Ville power station. In September, classes began at the elementary school for European children in the temporary premises. In the meantime, the population of the base grew to 450 Belgians and 8,000 Congolese. At the end of this year, the work on the final airstrip began.

The pace of the work on the base intensified over the next two years allowing it to become operational by the end of 1953. The buildings of the General Staff, the Air Force Staff and the Service corps had to be ready to receive the first Belgian clients, the student pilots of the EPA and the paratroopers as well as the first militiamen of the *Force Publique*.

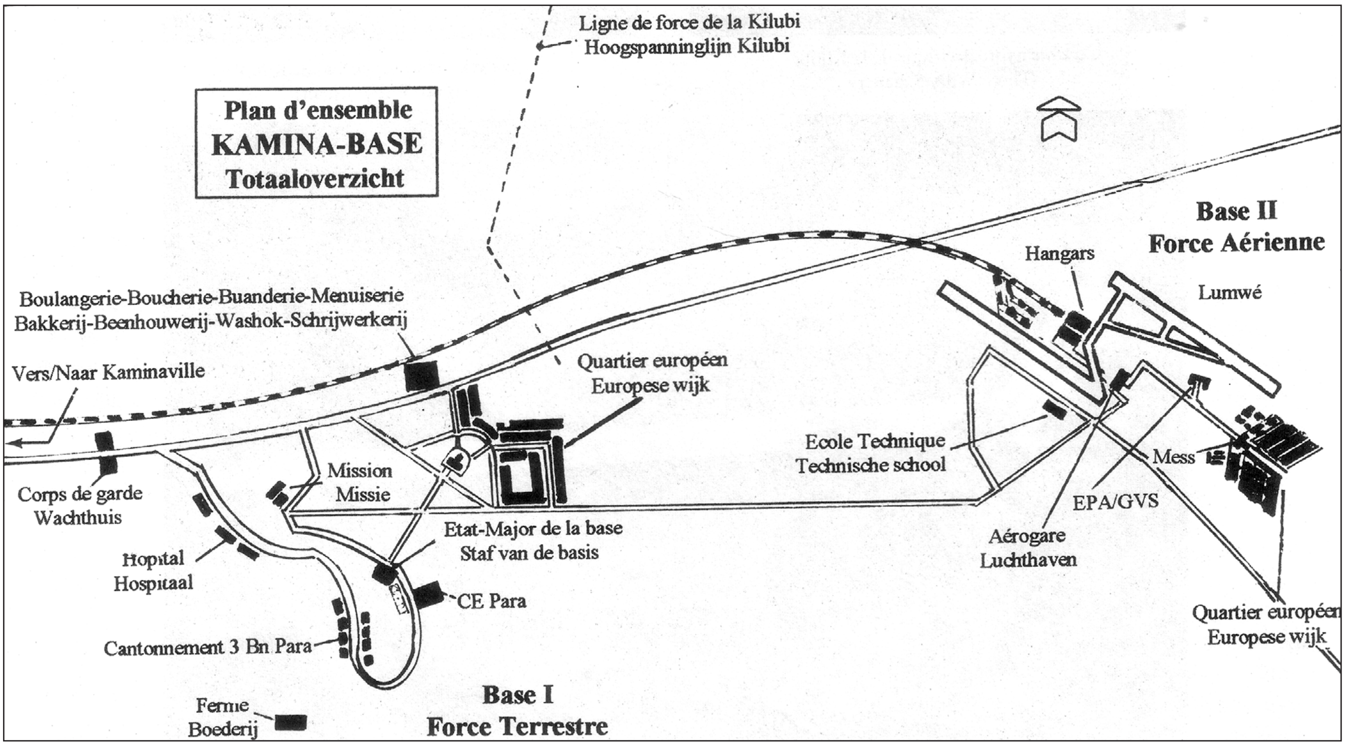
On 23 December 1952, the first 25 Congolese students who had passed the first cycle of the Technical School received their diploma. The school trained aviation technicians in two, two-year cycles: a period of basic training during the first cycle followed by specialised training during the second cycle (airframes, engines, instruments, electricity).

From 1952 onwards, 5,000 tons of various materials and equipment were unloaded each month to the logistics complex. A few villas for European families and 1,200 houses for African personnel were completed and this came as a relief after years spent in 'potopote' houses. The surroundings were improved by the planting of thousands of trees.

During 1953, *Base Aérienne Kamina* – now increasingly called BAKA – slowly became operational. On 2 April, Lieutenant Colonel Deman succeeded Lieutenant Colonel E. Janssens as head of the base. Janssens could be proud of the accomplishments of his team and the work of the manpower employed. He had been the pioneer



The hangars at BAKA provided a clearance height of 11 metres. (Author's collection)


Ligne de force de la Kilubi
Hoogspanninglijn Kilubi
Plan d'ensemble
KAMINA-BASE
Totaaloverzicht
Base II
Force Aérienne
Hangars
Lumwé
Boulangerie-Boucherie-Buanderie-Menuiserie
Bakkerij-Beenhouwerij-Washok-Schrijwerkerij
Vers/Naar Kaminaville
Quartier européen
Europese wijk
Ecole Technique
Technische school
Mess
EPA/GVS
Mission
Missie
Corps de garde
Wachthuis
Etat-Major de la base
Staf van de basis
Aérogare
Luchthaven
Hopital
Hospitaal
CE Para
Quartier européen
Europese wijk
Cantonnement 3 Bn Para
Ferme
Boederij
Base I
Force Terrestre

The plan written in Flemish and French shows the layout of the base. (Author's collection)

Key		Quartier européen	European quarter
Boulangerie	Bakery	Menuiserie	Carpentry workshop
Hôpital	Hospital	Etat-major	Chief of Staff
Boucherie	Butchers	Corps de garde	Guard room
Cantonnement	Barracks	Ecole Technique	Technical School
Buanderie	Laundry	Aérogare	Airport building

who carried out the reconnaissance of the terrain, composed the first teams and been able to motivate his subordinates over the first five years of the project bringing it to fruition. It had not always been an easy task. The climate was not ideal, the terrain was difficult, the necessary equipment and budget were not always available and sometimes politics got in the way. The result was impressive; 2,300 buildings covering 300,000 m² of built-up area, 20,000 m² of hangars, 180km of roads, 39km of railroads, 60km of water pipes and as many sewers. There was 75km of buried electricity and telephone networks and 70km of high-voltage lines built.

On the departure of Janssens, only the airfield was left to be completed but it became operational before the end of the year. In May, the vanguard of the Paracommando Regiment arrived in BAKA and detachments of 300 men were sent to complete a six-month tour. The same month, the first C-119 from Belgium landed at the base.

From 1953 onwards, paracommandos, colonial militiamen and student pilots, were part of daily life at BAKA. The first T-6 Harvards based at Brustem arrived in a C-119 in November and the student pilots of the 126th promotion arrived in December. They moved to the EPA, were officially inaugurated on 26 December 1953 and were the first of 18 sets of students to train at the school. Each student pilot flew 180 hours over a four-month period. In addition, the United States delivered 30 Harvards within the framework of the Mutual Defence Aid Programme, 24 were bought from the RAF Flying School in Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia and two more were acquired from the South African Air Force As planned, the terminal building was completed and the north runway was opened.

Given the vast expanse of bush around the base, a Flight Rescue Unit was created in June 1954 to provide a means of rapidly rescuing pilots making forced landings or paracommandos injured during exercises. To facilitate this task, in July, the first Bristol 171 Sycamore HR.14 B helicopter was delivered by C-119 and two other aircraft were delivered the following year. In May 1955, the base became fully operational and proudly received the visit of King Baudouin during his first trip to the Belgian Congo.

In 1956, the southern runway was finally completed and put into service, enabling BAKA to become fully operational. BAKA's Flight Transport had three DC-3 Dakotas and three more were added the same year. During 1957 and 1958 these Dakotas flew transport and liaison missions throughout the colony and dropped paracommandos. One of the six planes was stationed in Leopoldville on April 1, 1957, at the disposal of the Commander of the Metropolitan Troops.

4

The Belgians are Back

The vanguard of the Belgian FATAC vanguard left for Leopoldville aboard a Sabena flight on 1 June for Leopoldville. Arriving on 4 June at Kamina, the team was composed of three officers and seven NCOs under the command of Lieutenant Colonel A. Decock. Joining him was Major Sokay who oversaw logistics, Captain Van Dhelsen who took charge of operations and Captain F. Aerts whose role was to deal with technical problems. The seven NCOs were specialised in the running of air facilities, air traffic control, telecommunications and domestic facilities. The only vehicle available to the team was a white Willys jeep adorned with the word FATAC.

Two Douglas DC-6 A/C Liftmasters (KY-1/OT-CDA and KY-4/OT-CTP) from 15 Wing took off for Kamina on 7 June 1964. Later leased to Sabena – hence the change in registration – these aircraft travelled via Tripoli, Kano (northern Nigeria) before landing at Kamina on 8 June. Aboard were 61 passengers, eight tons of equipment and several bicycles. A second shipment left Melsbroek on 22 June aboard Liftmasters KY-2/OT-CDB and KY-4. Arriving in Kamina by the same route on 23 and 24 June respectively, this time they carried 72 passengers and six tons of equipment. This now meant the first FATAC detachment was now fully equipped and ready for operations.

The facilities at BAKA were in a deplorable state due to casualness, negligence and a degree of malice exacted by Swedish troops based at Kamina acting under the auspices of the UNOC. When the contingent began to withdraw in late 1963, they sabotaged the power lines to many buildings possibly fearing Kamina would be subsequently used by rebel groups as a base.

The water supply was in a sorry state due to a lack of maintenance and explained why the Congolese preferred to drill holes in the water pipes rather than attempt to pump it out. The wreckage of a

The Douglas DC-6 A/C registered KY-1 was one of three used to ferry equipment from Melsbroek air base to Kamina in June 1964. (Swietek collection)

FATAC
FATAC

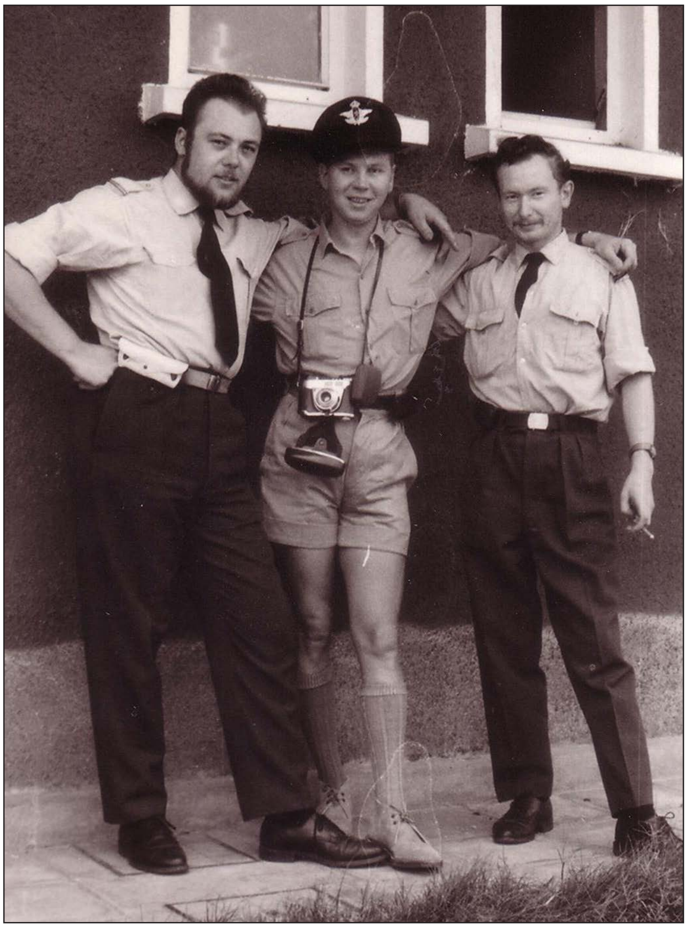
The only vehicle the FATAC possessed on its arrival at Kamina was a white Willys jeep left by forces of the United Nations Operations Congo (UNOC). (Paul Briers collection)

DODGE
FATAC
12202

Later the FATAC acquired a Dodge pickup that was fitted with a canvas awning. (Paul Briers collection)

Paul Briers cleans his Thompson submachine gun while what remained of a hunting trip, can be seen on his bunk. (Paul Briers collection)

Paul Briers (second left) was a telephony specialist arriving in the Congo in June 1964. Here, he is photographed outside the communications room at BAKA. (Paul Briers collection)



Briers (first left) pictured outside his living accommodation on the base. This photo shows that FATAC personnel continued to wear the uniforms of the Belgian Air Force. (Paul Briers collection)

Saab 29 Tunnan that had been used by Swedish forces was found in one of the hangars littered with empty crates. Repairs were needed to the control tower, the weather station instruments, the radio beacon and the base radio station; the Swedes had transformed the latter into a public broadcasting station rather than one adapted to military communications. It took some time before specialists managed to re-establish communication with Belgium.

Paul Briers (communications specialist):

Checklist of Pilot, Charles Vingerhoets

Before leaving for the FATAC detachment in Kamina, Charles Vingerhoets, an officer who had already served in the Congo, made a detailed checklist of things he should not forget and would make his life more comfortable during his two-month stay in BAKA:

Address: Cdt Avi Charles Vingerhoets, 2 Grpt FATAC, BP 10.226, Aerodrome N'Djili, Leopoldville, [Democratic] Republic of Congo

1 trunk + 1 suitcase (for missions)

Parachute bag x 1

Flight overalls + scarf

Long fur-lined cap

Gloves

Sunglasses

Raincoat (rainy season)

Webbing-backpack with straps

Water bottle with straps

Khaki shirts x 4

Shorts

Socks and ankle socks

Long khaki trousers

Coat rack (for laundry and nylon shirts)

Light civilian suit x 1 (for the trip there and back)

Civilian trousers x 1 (not absolutely necessary)

Nylon shirts x 2

Sports shirts x 2

Shorts x 6

T-shirts x 6

Socks x 4 pairs

Shoes + laces x 2

Pyjamas x 1

Slippers (pair of)

Washcloths and hand towels x 4

Shaving soap, deodorant, toothpaste, razor (electric + reserve)

Pre-shave lotion (not absolutely necessary), talc, sewing kit and safety pins matches (1 pack)

Alarm clock

Locks x 4

Writing paper + envelopes + Belgian postage stamps

Washing powder x 2

Packs of cigarettes (for the trip) can opener and corkscrew

Shoe cleaning kit

Toilet paper

DTT bottles (scented)

Torch + bulb and spare battery

Plastic bags x 5

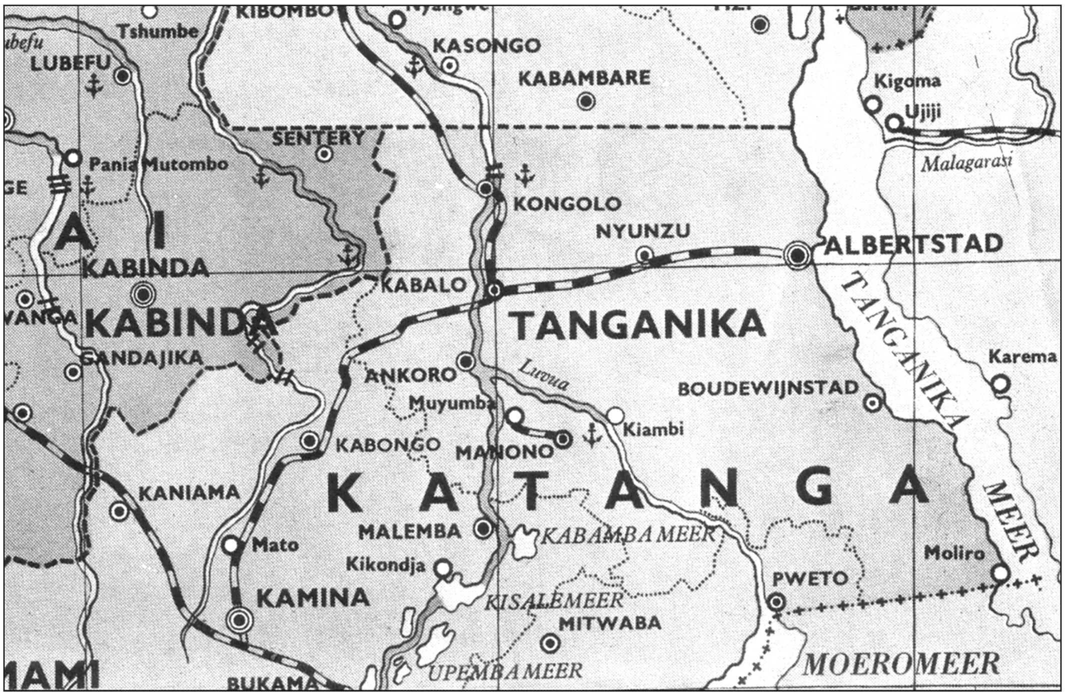
Medical kit with paludrine, halazone, aspirin, laudanum, tensoplast, mercurochrome, bandages, et cetera

Whistle, compass, switchblade, knife, fork and spoon

For use by the crew: coffee, tea, coffee pot and stove provided by 15 Wing

Passport, medical booklet, mission order, insurance

As an NCO in the U Télé Unit (Unité Télé, later Wing Télé), I worked as a telephony specialist in Brussels but was tempted by the opportunity to go to Africa and by the financial rewards of doing so. I left on a DC-6 from Melsbroek on 22 June arriving in Leopoldville and spent the night at the Sabena Guest House before continuing to Kamina. The flight having taken around 30 hours, for the first three nights we slept in bunks in the airport building. Willy Ruelle, Paul Mary and I then moved into a more comfortable room with hot and cold running water and we were each given a Thompson submachine gun, a Browning Automatic Pistol and ammunition. Along with Willy Ruelle, I was in charge of maintaining the ATEA telephone exchange and the BAKA telephone lines. Fortunately, we had the help of Faustin, a Congolese who had worked for the United Nations Operations, Congo (ONUC) troops, as he knew exactly where the communications cables could be found. At that time, there was no telephone connection with Belgium but nonetheless we were linked to the Belgian embassy in Leopoldville, with the Belgian consulate in Elisabethville and with the CAMAC and the ANC HQ.



Map (in Flemish) of operational areas around Kabalo. (Author's collection)

Our working day started at 6 am and ended at 1 pm after which we were free to do as we pleased. There was no water in the swimming pool on the base, however I had a nice relaxing job. It was spoiled only by the beginning of the tropical rains in mid-September and then, lightning strikes caused damage that had to be quickly repaired. Mail and food arrived weekly by air from Melsbroek and the meals on the base were good. We supplemented them with meat from our frequent hunting trips.

Emile Janssens (flight engineer):

Upon arrival at Kamina, we received a Thompson submachine gun, a GP pistol and ammunition. Unfortunately, we didn't know how to use them so soon enough, someone accidentally shot himself in the hand meaning that he couldn't fly for a few days. As for the accommodation, the rooms were infested with mice and rats and on some occasions in the afternoon we would pull the beds outside to relax in the sun and shoot at the vermin as they looked for food.

Jan Baras (navigator):

In the mess hall in the evening, we watched Marx Brothers and silent films. When the projection was underway, the rats would come out of their holes and appear along the walls in the light.

The Actions of the FATAC, 1964

By summer 1964, the Congo was on the brink of collapse. More than half of the territory was in the hands of the rebels and it stretched from the border with Congo-Brazzaville in the west to the shores of Lake Tanganyika in the east. It was directly threatening Leopoldville and to add insult to injury, the UN withdrew the last of its peacekeeping force at the end of June, a force present in the Congo since July 1960.

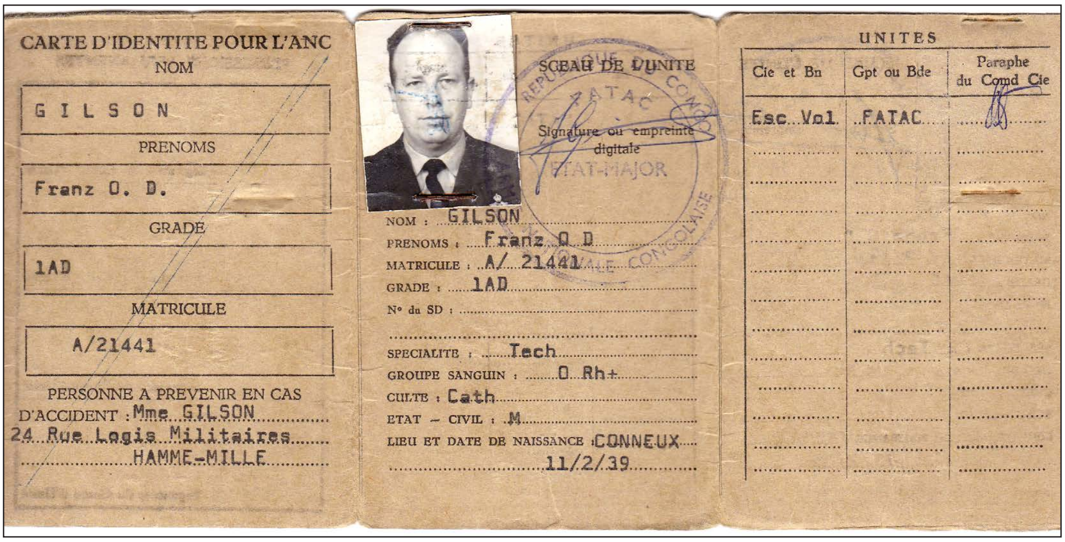
As the rebellion spread, Prime Minister Cyrille Adoula and the ANC appeared increasingly unable to manage the threat presented and in July 1964, former Katangan leader Moïse Tshombe was invited to replace Adoula. Since the beginning of 1963, Tshombe had been in exile in Spain following the defeat of Katangese military forces by the UN at the end of the Katanga secession. As prime minister of Katanga, Tshombe had managed to build-up an important network of contacts.

On coming to power on 10 July, Tshombe contacted those still loyal to his regime. These included mercenaries such as Mike Hoare, Jean Schramme and 'Bob' Denard. Along with the promise of the manpower they would bring to the fight against rebels, Tshombe had the backing of the United States plus an air force comprising two units, 21 and 22 Squadron of the FAC. At the time, there were six FATAC crews in the Congo operating C-47s. One was based in Leopoldville and the other five in Kamina. Soon, H-21 crews would be trained and ready to join the conflict.

In Katanga, the rebel army's advance was halted about 100 kilometres north of Kamina near the Kilubi River power plant. The rebels seized a train and headed towards Kamina at high speed but on 29 July 1964, they were spotted during a reconnaissance flight by the crew of an H-21, the first operational mission for one of the helicopters. The rebel force was pushed back by ANC forces under Lieutenant Colonel Eustache Kakudji who was able to make them retreat to Kabalo, a small town they captured during their advance on 15 August. Kabalo was an important railway junction linking the lines of the *Compagnie des Chemins de Fer du Congo Supérieur* with the Great Lakes network and there was an airfield large enough to accommodate C-47s. After the capture of the town by the ANC, the FATAC was also able to station H-21 helicopters there to support Kakudji's men as they headed towards Albertville.

Eyewitness account of Léon Hadermann, a pilot based in Leopoldville but stopping over in Inongo:

On 10 July 1964, we transported a load of ammunition from Leopoldville to Goma with a stopover at Inongo, a settlement located on a peninsula of Lake Leopold II and northeast of Leopoldville. We parked the aircraft in front of the small airfield building but were immediately surrounded by ANC soldiers. When they discovered that the ammunition was being transported by a white crew in an aircraft bearing what they thought was the flag of Romania – a blue, yellow and red flag suggested by Colonel Bouzin – we were taken to the building at gunpoint. Indeed, they were convinced that we were transporting ammunition for supporters of Pierre Mulele (Mulelists) that were operating in the area. After a short while, we were taken outside the building where a car stopped in front of us carrying an ANC general. Then, asking the officer guarding us what he intended to do, the reply was that we were to be shot as we were rebels. With this, the general almost had a heart attack. He recognised me because I was a daily visitor to his headquarters in Leopoldville to discuss missions with Bouzin. This sure was a lucky escape! Outside Leopoldville, hardly anyone knew that the FATAC was



CARTE D'IDENTITE POUR L'ANC

NOM
GILSON

PRENOMS
Franz O. D.

GRADE
1AD

MATRICULE
A/21441

PERSONNE A PREVENIR EN CAS D'ACCIDENT : Mme GILSON
24 Rue Logis Militaires
HAMME-MILLE

SCEAU DE L'UNITE

Signature ou empreinte digitale

NOM : GILSON
PRENOMS : Franz O D
MATRICULE : A/ 21441
GRADE : 1AD
N° du SD :
SPECIALITE : Tech
GROUPE SANGUIN : O Rh+
CULTE : Cath
ETAT – CIVIL : M
LIEU ET DATE DE NAISSANCE CONNEUX 11/2/39

UNITES

Cie et Bn	Gpt ou Bde	Paraphe du Comd Cie
Esc Vol	FATAC	

After the arrest of FATAC pilots at Kabalo, they were issued with identity cards stating their allegiance to the ANC. This one belonged to pilot Franz Gilson. (Franz Gilson collection)

In 1962, the current Colonel Léonard Mulamba (later Major General) was assigned to command the 3rd Groupement of the ANC at Stanleyville. During the Simba rebellion, he gained recognition for his defence of the area around Bukavu and was respected by white and black soldiers alike. (Author's collection)

Here, ANC troops are pictured during the defence of Kongolo. A FATAC pilot watches on. (Author's collection)

flying aircraft in support of the ANC. After this episode, I refused to continue with my mission and returned to Leopoldville. To avoid future encounters such as this, at a meeting between Mobutu and Bouzin it was agreed that we would carry an ANC identity card and a letter from Mobutu stating that we should be given assistance if necessary.

The account of Alain Blume (pilot and operations officer):

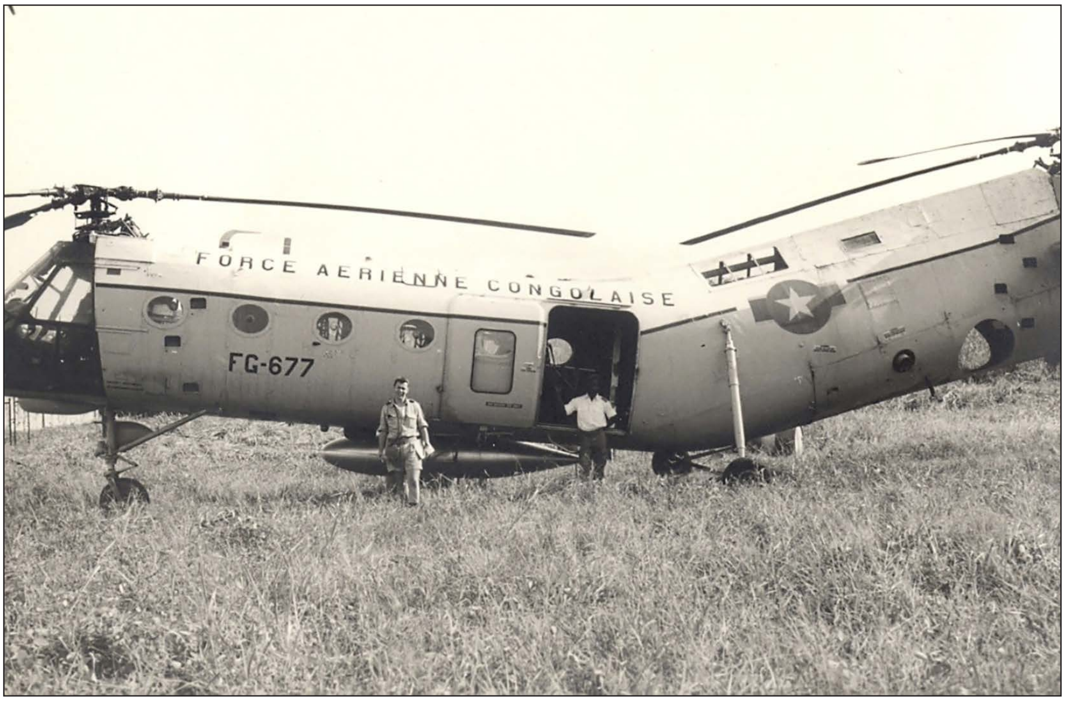
On July 28, the rebels approached the town of Kabongo by train from Kongolo. The ANC soldiers from the Kabongo garrison laid down their weapons and fled towards Kamina and the approach of the rebel forces caused so much panic at BAKA that there was even talk of evacuating the base. However, General Bobozo sent reinforcements commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Kakudji to stop the rebels and retake Kabongo. Like the rebels, to carry out their mission, the ANC reversed a train from Kamina to Kabongo so that if stiff opposition was met, a withdrawal could be made as quickly as possible. This meant that there were two trains on the same section of track at the same time. This caused a problem for Cuban pilots assigned to attack the rebel train using T-28s. They spotted the ANC train but given its position they obviously thought they were dealing with the rebel train. After they had made their first strafing run, the pilots realised their mistake and went in search of the train carrying the rebels and arriving from Kongolo.

Robert Feuillen (onboard radio operator):

During the conquest of Kongolo in July 1964, the rebels seized a train. Their intention was to conquer Elisabethville by rail but it was likely they would also target the Kilubi hydroelectric power station that supplied BAKA with electricity. The technicians moved into the transit accommodation built on either side of the mess block and one evening at about 11, the crews who were sleeping in their bunks suddenly received the following order: "The rebels are attacking. Get up without lighting up. Get dressed and take your weapons". Some of us went up to the top of the air terminal building to set up an observation post but with rounds whistling past our ears, we quickly retreated to the lower floor. An hour later, Alain Blume arrived at the darkened building to tell us that it was not a rebel attack but one made by the ANC housed in a building formerly used by the pilot training school. They had got drunk and decided to empty the magazines of their weapons.

Paul Briers (communications specialist):

On 21 July 1964, I was one of the lucky people chosen to be part of a delegation sent by C-47 to Elisabethville to attend a reception at the Belgian consulate. The next day we planned to fly to the Upemba National Park but as the pilots were not in good shape after the previous night, it was called off. As for the situation at BAKA, it became a little more tense at the end of August. There were numerous rumours that the rebels were advancing towards Kamina and to prevent a train from entering the base, Lieutenant Colonel A. Decock asked us to remove part of a switch on the railway track that linked the town to the base. Five of us spent the



FG-677 took part in Operation Flagpole during early August 1964. (Author's collection)

night carrying out the work so that in the four months I was at BAKA, I never saw a single train.

In August, I saw the first Cuban mercenaries and pilots arrive at BAKA. Sometimes, a USAF C-130 landed at the base and it provided a real spectacle as we had never seen one before – these aircraft bringing in ammunition. Another recollection of my time in the Congo was my weapon being 'requisitioned' by my friend Paul Mary for a mission aboard an H-21. When the helicopter returned, my weapon had been lost but four elephant tusks suddenly appeared. I returned to Belgium at the end of September having spent three wonderful months in the Congo.

Operation Flagpole

In early August 1964, four H-21 helicopters were operational. On 5 August, the H-21 FG-677 left Leopoldville for an operational mission in rebel-occupied Stanleyville where a group of US consulate officials including Consul Michael Hoyt were being held hostage by forces under Nicolas Olenga. Operation Flagpole was designed by the CIA to free them and to persuade FATAC pilots to take part in the operation; it was presented as a humanitarian mission.

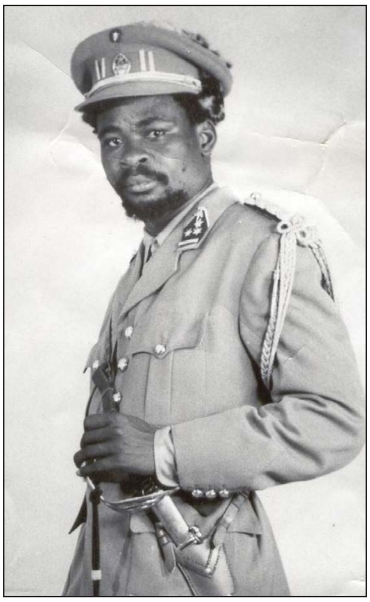
The crew comprised pilots Gilbert Lechat, Liévin van Outryve d'Ydewalle and mechanic Gustaaf Verheyden. A second helicopter piloted by Americans, was also due to take part in the operation. The two helicopters acted independently and the American-piloted helicopter made a stopover at Inongo on the shores of Lake Leopold II.

The ANC troops on the ground were not aware of this operation and the crew members of the H-21 were arrested as spies. Notwithstanding a long discussion between the crew and local leaders, it was decided they would be executed. The situation was finally resolved when C-47 9T-PKI, piloted by Major Migliavacca, landed at Inongo (his crew was navigator M. Viseur, radio operator J. Verteneuil and mechanic J. Restiau).

Sent to the Congo specifically to take part in Operation Flagpole, FG-677 was able to refuel and leave. Too late to reach the next stopover in Coquilhatville, the FG-677 crew found the first suitable place to land in the bush and spent the night there.

The next day, they reached Lisala near Coquilhatville from where they were supposed to transport US troops to Stanleyville to free the hostages. In reality, the group comprised Cuban exile commandos led by the CIA's William 'Rip' Robertson and as soon as the Belgians arrived at Lisala, they were fired upon by rebel forces attempting to take the city. The crew was ordered to Bumba to make a renewed attempt to reach Stanleyville but by that time, the Belgians had decided to return to Leopoldville. No one asked them for an explanation, nor were they prepared to give any. Operation Flagpole ended there and then with the hostages being held until the end of November 1964.

The crew of 9T-PKI took part in Operation Flagpole. (Author's collection)



'General' Nicolas Olenga was the leader of rebel forces that captured Stanleyville in July 1964. (Author's collection)

Colonel Frédéric Vandewalle and the Ommegang

At the end of August 1964, Colonel Frédérik Vandewalle was sent by the Belgian government to Leopoldville to become military advisor to Moïse Tshombe. A veteran of the *Force Publique* and an advisor to Tshombe during the Katangese secession, Vandewalle had a highly developed knowledge of the Congo and was an acquaintance of President Kasa-Vubu and Mobutu.

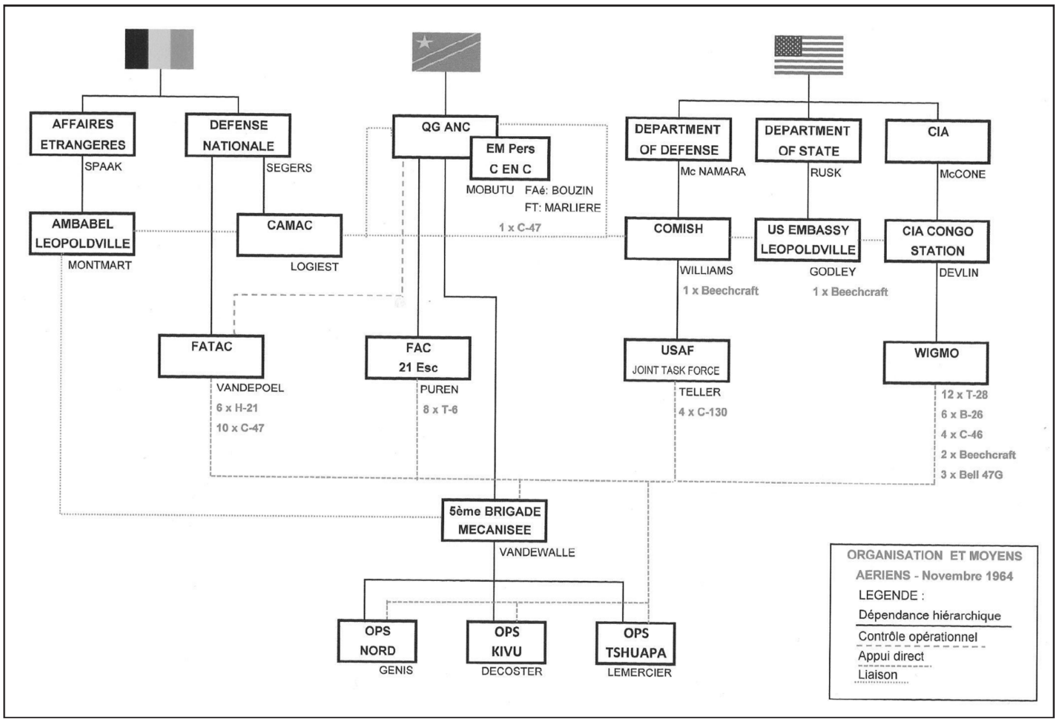
Colonel Frédérik Vandewalle was a graduate of Belgium's officer military academy, the *Ecole Militaire*. He then attended the Colonial School (*Ecole Coloniale*) and served as an officer in the *Force Publique* from 1937 to 1957, taking part in the Second World War and seeing action in Nigeria and the Middle East. Vandewalle then became Chief Administrator of the Security of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi on January 1, 1957 – a position he held until 30 June 1960. After the independence of the Congo, he became an advisor to Moïse Tshombe and from 1961 to 1963, he finished his career as commander of the School of Infantry in Arlon Belgium, a role he kept until 1968. (Author's collection)

ANC Chief of Staff Mobutu entrusted Colonel Vandewalle with the mission of reconquering the territories occupied by the rebels and freeing the Europeans and Americans held by the Simba in Stanleyville, along with reducing the threat to others in the surrounding areas. Vandewalle's idea was to go on the offensive with a few mobile columns made up of mercenary units with the ANC backed by air support from 21 and 22 squadrons of the FAC. Belgian soldiers from the airfield defence units (UDéf) were also called in to support the ANC soldiers in securing and defending the recovered airfields.

By 1 November 1964, the group, known collectively as the 5th Mechanised Brigade, had been assembled by Vandewalle and was ready to advance northwards from Kamina while sub-units comprising mercenaries, attacked rebel positions in the west and north of the Congo. The objective being to converge on Stanleyville, the centre of rebel activity. The weapons, vehicles and equipment used by the 5th Brigade was such a motley mix that Colonel Vandewalle was to remark: 'I really feel like I'm in command of the Ommegang'. This was an allusion to the folkloric processions common in medieval Brussels and the name stuck.

The Capture of Albertville and Operation Watch Chain

In July 1964, the Council of National Liberation (CNL) set up an opposition government in Albertville. It was presided by Gaston Soumialot with Laurent-Désiré Kabila as his vice-president. To challenge the CNL, towards the end of August, units of 5 Commando under Mike Hoare attempted to take the city by surprise by following Lake Tanganyika northwards. This operation, known as Operation Watch Chain, being hastily improvised and Tshombe wishing to keep it hidden from the ANC command, failed miserably through a lack of coordination with Mulamba's troops. Albertville was to change hands several times over the coming days and finally, on 29 August 1964, the city was taken by ANC troops under Lieutenant Colonel Kakudji. Two days later, a second column of ANC under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Bangala arrived from Baudouinville and Albertville was now firmly in the hands of government troops.


AFFAIRES ETRANGERES
SPAAK
DEFENSE NATIONALE
SEGERS
AMBABEL LEOPOLDVILLE
MONTMART
CAMAC
LOGIEST
QG ANC
EM Pers C EN C
MOBUTU
FAé: BOUZIN
FT: MARLIERE
1 x C-47
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
Mc NAMARA
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
RUSK
CIA
McCONE
COMISH
WILLIAMS
1 x Beechcraft
US EMBASSY LEOPOLDVILLE
GODLEY
1 x Beechcraft
CIA CONGO STATION
DEVLIN
FATAC
VANDEPOEL
6 x H-21
10 x C-47
FAC 21 Esc
PUREN
8 x T-6
USAF JOINT TASK FORCE
TELLER
4 x C-130
WIGMO
12 x T-28
6 x B-26
4 x C-46
2 x Beechcraft
3 x Bell 47G
5ème BRIGADE MECANISEE
VANDEWALLE
OPS NORD
GENIS
OPS KIVU
DECOSTER
OPS TSHUAPA
LEMERCIER
ORGANISATION ET MOYENS AERIENS - Novembre 1964
LEGENDE :
Dépendance hiérarchique
Contrôle opérationnel
Appui direct
Liaison

The organisational structure of government and pro-government forces in the Congo, November 1964. (Author's collection)

As for FATAC involvement in the operation, 9T-PKE brought its commanding officer Andy De Cock to attend a ceremony at Albertville presided by General Bobozo which was held to celebrate the ANC victory. On September 2, the C-47 flew to Kamipini before landing at Pepa and on 3 September it was involved in the rescue of 17 employees of the Filtisaf company that had been detained by rebels under the threat of death. The crew comprised Karlowski, Williquet, Feuillen and Tison. Mercenaries were then stationed at Kamipini airfield lest the Simba return and try to retake lost ground. When the news of the fall of Albertville reached Stanleyville, General Olenga became violently angry at the Americans and 'their

AEROPORT
KAMIPINI

The airstrip at Kamipini was part of farming land owned by a Flemish farming family. (Author's collection)

Jeeps intended for use in Operation Watch Chain are unloaded from a C-47 sent in support of the operation. (Author's collection)

The cargo was flown in to Kamipini by a crew commanded by A. Devisscher, seen here (centre). Juan Peron of 22 Squadron of the FAC is pictured far left. (Author's collection)

henchmen'. On September 5, he had the staff of the American consulate and many whites locked up in the central prison.

Operation Watch Chain as told by Major Alain Blume:

> During the absence of our Commander Andy Decock, Mike Hoare arrived at BAKA with a plan to attack Albertville from the lake with about 30 mercenaries to free the hostages. He named this Operation Watch Chain and it was our responsibility to transport the men and equipment as close as possible to the place of embarkation. The reconnaissance of the Kamipini landing site brought the first problems. It was a strip of land that was owned by a Flemish family called Demaeght and which was found on the largest cattle farm and slaughterhouse in the Congo. Lying near a lake, the airstrip was located on a slope between two valleys. Accordingly, for the pilots of the FATAC, it was impossible to land a C-47. Nonetheless, I wanted to give it a try.
>
> Since I was not qualified to fly a C-47, I had to find a pilot who was willing to go there and called upon A. Devisscher. He told me that the strip was more than adequate for our needs, so afterwards I had no difficulty in convincing the other pilots that flying to Kamipini would be part of our routine. Loading and unloading the jeeps needed for the expedition was always a delicate operation in a C-47 but this time it required a lot of improvisation because we were forced to use the loading ramps of the C-119 Boxcar abandoned at Kamina. As for the inflatable boats with their outboard motors and fuel, they were brought by American C-130s to Kamina and placed in our C-47s without any problem.
>
> On August 23, we flew to Kamipini and made a reconnaissance flight over Albertville. We did not notice anything except three armoured vehicles around the airfield and two days later we were due to meet up with Mike Hoare's column once it had taken control of the runway at Albertville. We flew around in vain for an hour under rebel fire and one rebel even climbed a ladder thinking it would improve his chances of shooting us down. One round passed through the cockpit where the radio operator normally sat and discouraged by the whole episode, we returned to Kamipini. Operation Watch Chain was a total fiasco mainly because of the lack of enthusiasm of Hoare's mercenaries.
>
> New boats and their engines had never been broken in or tested and to compound the situation, only three could be inflated. The engines failed one after the other due to

The C-47 registered 9T-PKA, crashed at Gemena on 2 October 1964 while transporting mercenaries and ammunition. Everything that could be salvaged was sold to white farmers in the region. (Author's collection)

the use of the wrong fuel so the trip to Albertville had to be made mostly using paddle power. As the mercenaries landed too far from their objective, they had to make the rest of the trip on foot. This left them open to ambushes from which they had to retreat.

Further Cooperation with Mercenary Forces, Bumba, October 1964

Following the crash of 9T-PKA, the cooperation between the FATAC and mercenary forces became a frequent feature of a Belgian intervention that was supposedly, of maintaining aircraft, keeping lines of communication open and ferrying an array of supplies around eastern Congo. FATAC crews, including those commanded by warrant officer M. Géruzet, continued to operate along the Gemena – Lisala – Bumba axis. They transported and supplied Belgian mercenary units led by Captain Robert Noddyn while others were led by South African, Lieutenant Gary Wilson. The objective of these groups was to pursue the Simba into the dense forests of the Congo. In the meantime, the 5th Mechanised Brigade was preparing to leave on its long march northwards from Kamina.

Michel Géruzet (pilot):

ONGOLAISE
9 PKB

Mercenaries fitted 9T-PKB with a machine gun so that it began to resemble a gunship. (Author's collection)

Between 10 – 12 October 1964, we made two flights (crew – Goorts, Fernandez and Renders) to Gemena to pick up the mercenaries and their kit and to take them to Lisala. The mercenaries were preparing to take Bumba, a town occupied by rebels and while at Lisala, the mercenaries had removed the door of our 9T-PKB aircraft and installed a .30 calibre machine gun on a tripod. Our C-47 (now resembling a gunship) was also loaded with crates of grenades. One of the mercenaries on board our plane was Belgian Bob Noddyn.

On October 14, four T-28s [from 22 Squadron] attacked Bumba with rockets while we circled over the town in case any of the Cubans had to make a forced landing on islands along the River Congo or were shot down. Fortunately, my radio man A. Fernandez, understood Spanish and was able to follow the conversations between the Cuban pilots. We noticed that they were firing from a height of 6,000 feet making the rockets go just about anywhere. To complete what were crazy scenes, the mercenaries were throwing grenades out of the windows of the C-47 onto the rebels below.

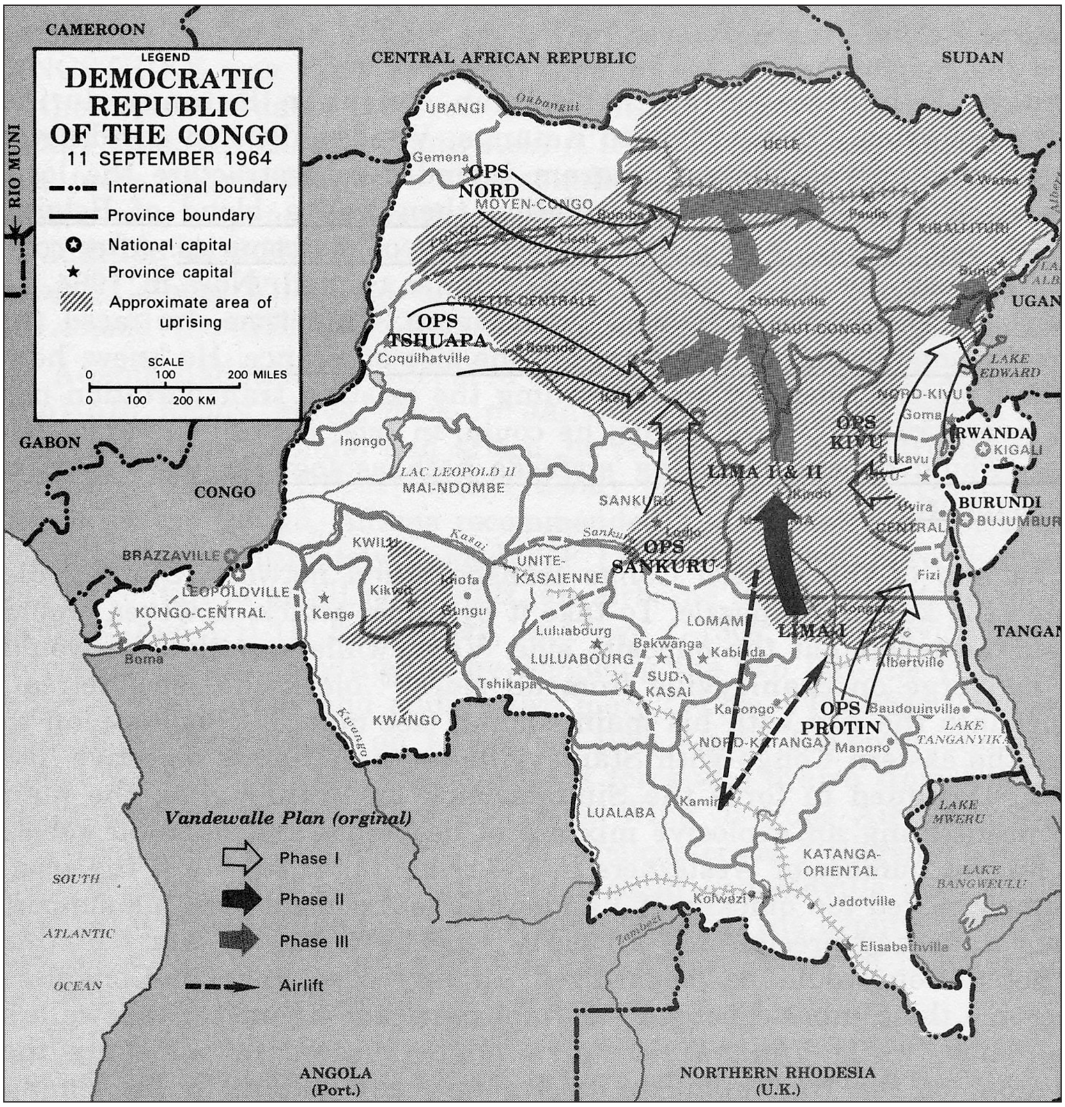
As we circled, we spotted a column of trucks covered with palm leaves trying to escape. The T-28s strafed the column and destroyed four of the trucks. On 17 October, we returned to Bumba and to our horror we discovered bodies all around the airfield. Most of them were just kids who had been drugged and sent into fight professional soldiers. The mercenary forces took Bumba that same day while we returned to Lisala carrying nuns and priests that had been held captive by the Simba. On October 19, we left Lisala for Leopoldville via Coquilhatville, then we were sent back to Kamina on 23 October to resume daily flights to Kabalo, Manono and Kongolo.

The Vandewalle Plan

According to the Vandewalle Plan, or the 'Ommegang', the 5th Mechanised Brigade was divided into two main columns codenamed Lima 1 and Lima 2. The plan consisted of Lima 1 under Lieutenant Colonel A. Liégeois, leaving Kongolo and heading to Kindu to take it from rebel control. Once this objective was achieved, Lima 2 under Lieutenant Colonel R. Lamouline, was to be airlifted into Kindu. From here, Lima 2 would head north followed two days later by Lima 1. The two columns were to meet up in Lubutu, a day's drive from Stanleyville and from here they would launch their offensive on Stanleyville.

Additionally, a third column codenamed 'Papa' and under the command of Major A. Protin, was to advance on the right flank of the Congo from Manono towards Kabambare *via* Albertville and Fizi. To prevent the rebels from concentrating their troops against the main axis of the Ommegang offensive, secondary operations were to take place in strategic areas.

During these secondary operations 'Ops Kivu' was to make its way from Bukavu


LEGEND
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
11 SEPTEMBER 1964
International boundary
Province boundary
National capital
Province capital
Approximate area of uprising
SCALE
0 100 200 MILES
0 100 200 KM
CAMEROON
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
SUDAN
RIO MUNI
GABON
CONGO
BRAZZAVILLE
ANGOLA (Port.)
NORTHERN RHODESIA (U.K.)
RWANDA
KIGALI
BURUNDI
BUJUMBURA
SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
OPS NORD
OPS TSHUAPA
OPS KIVU
OPS SANKURU
OPS PROTIN
LIMA I & II
LIMA I
UBANGI
Gemena
MOYEN-CONGO
CUVETTE CENTRALE
Coquilhatville
UELE
Paulis
KIBALI-ITURI
HAUT CONGO
Stanleyville
NORD-KIVU
Goma
Bukavu
CENTRAL
Fizi
Inongo
LAC LEOPOLD II
MAI-NDOMBE
SANKURU
LEOPOLDVILLE
KONGO-CENTRAL
Boma
Kenge
KWILU
Kikwit
KWANGO
UNITE-KASAIENNE
Luluabourg
LULUABOURG
Bakwanga
SUD-KASAI
Tshikapa
LOMAMI
Kabinda
Kongolo
Albertville
Baudouinville
LAKE TANGANYIKA
Kabongo
Manono
NORD-KATANGA
Kamina
LUALABA
KATANGA-ORIENTAL
Kolwezi
Jadotville
Elisabethville
LAKE MWERU
LAKE BANGWEULU
LAKE EDWARD
Vandewalle Plan (orginal)
Phase I
Phase II
Phase III
Airlift

This map illustrates the plan of attack put together by Frédérik Vandewalle. **(Author's collection)**

towards Bunia; the 'Tshuapa Ops' column was to head from Coquilhatville *via* Boende and Ikela towards Opala, and the 'Ops North' column was to depart from Gemena and travel through Lisala, Bumba and Buta to Paulis. The FATAC was to participate in the all the operations carried out by these different columns.

The 850km trek to Stanleyville began on 1 November 1964 when Lima 1 reached the town of Kongolo by rail, air and road. As it advanced towards Kindu, it became clear the Simba had been active in the area as the large number of corpses showed signs that people had been killed in a brutal manner. The column reached Kindu on 5 November and between Kongolo and Kindu, more than 300 captives of the Simba were freed by Lima 1. Over the coming two weeks, Lima 1 was joined by the troops of Lima 2 transported by the FATAC and by USAF C-130s. Also arriving in Kindu, were the CIA's group of Cuban commandos. Their primary mission was to free US hostages held in Stanleyville.

Both columns headed towards Stanleyville on 19 November 1964. Strong resistance was met but gradually the 5th Mechanised Brigade made progress and reached Lubutu on 22 November. Still 200km from its destination, the Ops Nord column arrived in Lisala at the end of September, occupied Bumba on October 17 and arrived in Paulis on 9 December. During its advance, it freed over a thousand white hostages. As for the Tshuapa column, it occupied Boende on 24 October and Ikela on 6 November. The Ops Kivu column advanced north from Bukavu and reached Bunia in December.

Lieutenant Colonel Liégeois. Formerly of the 3rd Ardennes Chasseurs, he commanded Lima 1 on the route to Stanleyville in November 1964. (Author's collection)

Veterans' Accounts of Operations

Kamiel Wyckaert, Navigator, Kindu, November 1964:

> On 5 November 1964 aboard 9T-PKH, we received the mission to supply the Lima 1 column of the Ommegang with ammunition as it had run out 30km south of Kindu. In preparation, a WIGMO B-26 made passing runs over the column to ensure there were no enemy forces around and its crew were able to direct us to the most suitable dropping areas. This was no easy task as the column was advancing through the bush meaning we could only drop a few crates of ammunition at the end of the afternoon.
>
> Something else we had to do was to check the condition of the runway at Kindu as it was made of concrete. However, we were unable to do so that day as we were shot at by rebels situated along the intersection of the main road leading to the airfield.

We returned to Kongolo as night was falling but the next day Vandepoel ordered us to return in the morning. We had to sleep on the floor of the aircraft that night but for breakfast some ANC soldiers gave us fresh mangoes. We took off at daybreak and were the first crew to land in Kindu after Lima 1 had emptied the town of the Simba. Some had been taken prisoner and were being used to clear the landing strip of the oil drums they had spread across it to hinder our planes landing. This took about half an hour but more oil drums were discovered under the palm trees and in the grass that lined the airfield. I started to move them but quickly realised that they were full of excrement. Cutting my hands as I tried to clean it off my hands, my only thought was why the rebels did not use the fuel instead of emptying the oil and using the drums as a toilet. In the end, a jeep used by the Ommegang drove us to the centre of Kindu and we found that General Olenga had abandoned the town leaving it in total chaos.

Antonio Fernandez, Onboard Radio Operator, November 5, 1964 – reconnaissance mission from Kamina to Kindu via Kongolo:

The crew (M. Géruzet, G. Goorts, A. Fernandez and M. Renders) was ready to taxi aboard 9T-PKE when Lieutenant Colonel Vandepoel arrived at high speed in a jeep. He was extremely excited and wanted to accompany us to get a visual on the situation in Kindu and surroundings, areas that were still occupied by the rebels. According to his information, the Ommegang column was close to the city but our pilot Géruzet was not very keen on the operation. In his own words, "I won't be a cowboy over a Kindu full of Simba", he said. However, he could not disobey orders and we set off for Kindu. Approaching the town, we then circled at a height of 1,000m to look for the Ommegang column. We sighted it and flew over it a few times before heading for the airfield. A former fighter pilot, Vandepoel wanted to make a low run and from this position we were able to see that the Simba had spread oil drums across the landing strip. Though we didn't notice it at the time, when we arrived back in Kamina and inspected our aircraft, we discovered it had been hit 18 times. It was a lucky escape.

November 6, 1964

With Kindu now liberated, we received orders to transport ammunition and food to the town and to return with hostages taken by the Simba. We landed without any problem and parked the plane in front of the control tower. We then discovered that the Simba had set up a .30 calibre machine gun in the tower and that it was directed towards the runway. We were told by a priest and some nuns we rescued that we were risking their lives by flying over Kindu for the return trip. Nevertheless, they were incredibly happy to be able to board our plane.

Paul Van Boxstael (pilot):

On 19 November 1964, I landed in Leopoldville as a passenger on a DC-6. The following day I carried out a test flight on the 9T-PKF and it being operational, we flew back to BAKA via Kindu and Kongolo on November 21 and 22. Arriving back at base, after a few days of rest, we carried out one or two missions per day from November 25 flying some 200 hours over the next two months or so. Sometimes our missions were not very organised and we regularly transported fuel drums to Kindu that were badly sealed, a real danger in an aircraft. Another example of poor organisation was on 26 November when we flew two tons of ammunition to Kindu to supply the men of the Ommegang. After landing, the officer in charge noticed that the ammunition was for weapons that his unit did not have but we unloaded them anyway and left for Kamina.

Operations at Kabambare

While the Lima 1 and 2 progressed northwards, on 13 November the Papa column left Albertville under the command of Major André Protin, a Belgian officer in the Force Aérienne and someone who knew the Congo well. The unit was known as 9 Commando and was reinforced by Katangese troops commanded by Major Utshidi. Its role was to ensure that lines of communications in the east of the main columns, remained open to prevent the Simba from threatening the advance of the Ommegang as it passed through northern Katanga. Major Protin would later become the commander of 15 Wing's airfield defence squadron.

On 17 November, 9 Commando seized the town of Kabambare, a town located on the plateau of the same name between Kongolo and Lake Tanganyika. It was the location of the first trading post set up by Europeans in the Congo and the scene of a battle between the Force Publique and Arab traders some 70 years earlier. Kabambare was retaken by the Simba on 20 November leaving two Europeans and more than 80 ANC dead. Around 60 survivors of the attack now found themselves isolated in Simba-held territory.

Jean Schramme, a Belgian landowner and now commander of 10 Commando, or the Leopard Battalion, received orders to relieve the men trapped on the Kabambare plateau. Leaving from Kongolo, it took another three weeks for his unit to reach its destination so the survivors were supplied with food, water and medication by the FATAC.

Paul Van Boxstael (pilot):

Since there was no airfield in the area, my own crew plus another commanded by Piet Velghe's crew, made parachute drops on to the Kabambare plateau. Most of the time we dropped bags of flour

Lima 1 of the 5th Mechanised Brigade makes its way from Kongolo to Stanleyville in November 1964. (Author's collection) and cigarettes at very low altitude in a free drop but we found that the bags of flour burst on impact so that the dropping zone resembled a huge white spot. Later, we learnt that the mercenaries sold the flour and cigarettes to the local population. Perhaps it is not surprising that we were not ordered to drop in ammunition.

Gabriël Christiaen (pilot):

We made several flights aboard H-21s, sometimes under rebel fire, to evacuate the wounded from Kabambare and to take them to Kongolo. The wounded including Protin, were airlifted to Kongolo and from here to Leopoldville where they received further treatment.

Edgard Brokken (pilot):

In theory, our H-21 could carry 20 passengers. In practice and if being shot at from all sides, things were quite different and we had to take off as quickly as possible. On one occasion a large group of Congolese attempted to board the helicopter at Kabambare and a crew member, Léon Pourbaix, had to push them away so we could depart.

The Ommegang and Operation Red Dragon/Dragon Rouge

The leaders of the CNL become more anxious at the threat posed by the advance of the 5th Mechanised Brigade and the increased threat to execute hostages. In Lubutu on 23 November, Vandewalle received orders to march on Stanleyville and to free it from the hands of its captors.

The plan was straightforward:

1) Lima 1 will occupy the centre of the city while the armoured platoon advance to the bridge over the Tshopo River to block the road north. Then, the 5th Mechanised Brigade would occupy the port and look for ways to cross the river.
2) Lima 2 would seize Camp Ketele, the police camp and Camp Leopold to cut off access roads leading from the east to the European part of the city.
3) A company of the ANC would secure the banks.
4) Once the connection with airborne troops had been established, the 5th Mechanised Brigade would head for the airfield to meet up with airborne troops and to coordinate the continuation of operations.

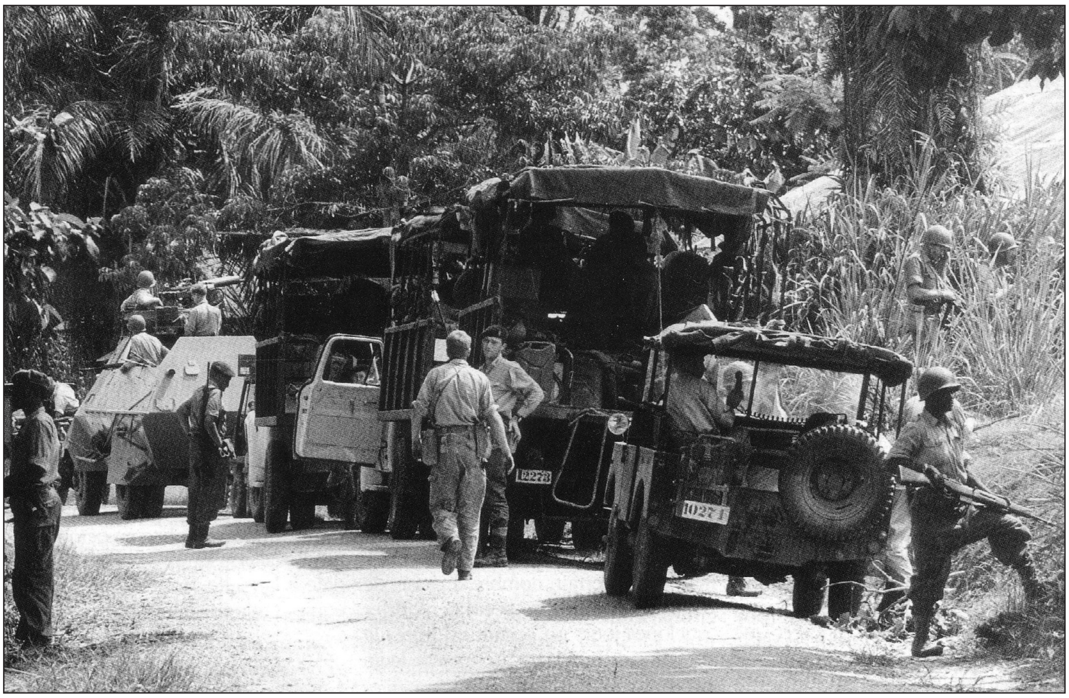
To make the most of the element of surprise and to avoid the Simba meting out their revenge on the hostages in Stanleyville, it was decided that no prior air reconnaissance of the city would be carried out. On the ground, at 1730hrs on 23 November, an impressive procession of armoured troop-carrying vehicles left Lubutu and headed north. The Ommegang met some resistance and suffered a small number of casualties.

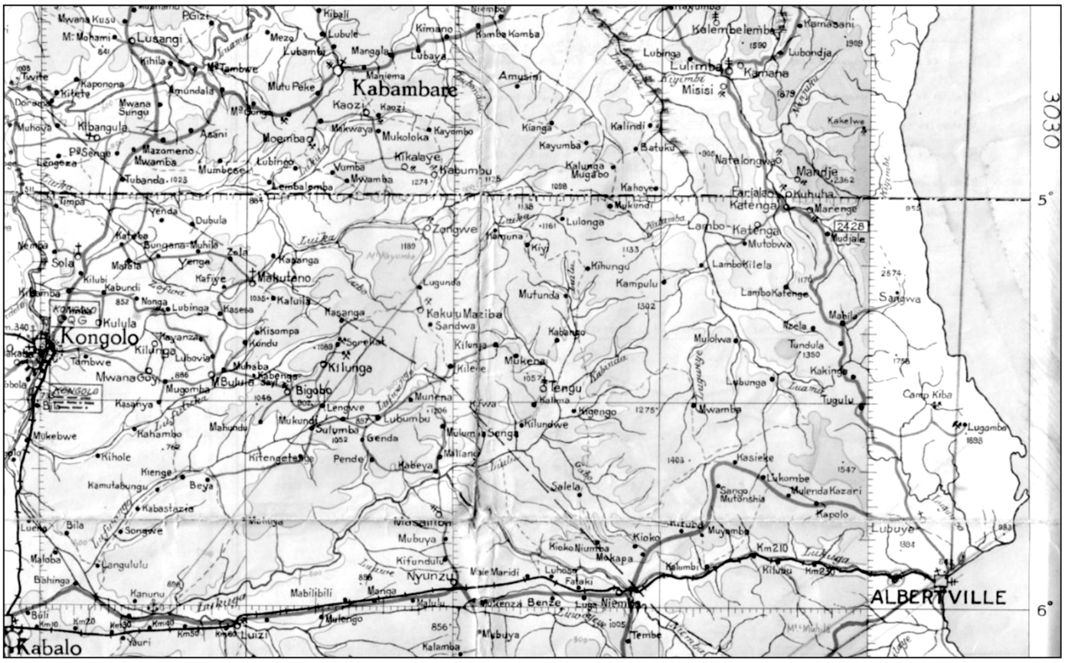
The carrying out of operation Red Dragon of 17–25 November consisted of three phases. In the first phase, 12 C-130s provided and operated by the USAF, left Kleine-Brogel Air Base in Belgium loaded with 545 Belgian paratroopers, four armoured jeeps, four radio jeeps, 12 AS-24 tricycles, ammunition and other equipment. A stopover on Ascension Island was followed by a flight to BAKA on the night of 21–22 November as the paratroops prepared themselves for an assault on Simi-Simi Airport, Stanleyville's main hub for aerial transport. As Simi-Simi was under rebel control, the airport had to be cleared of any obstacle preventing the unloading of troops and material. Therefore, preparatory attacks were made on Simba positions around the runway by B-26s and T-28s of the 22 Squadron (FAC), or 'Makasi'.

At 0600hrs on the 24 November, the first Belgian troops were dropped over the airfield. This second phase involved 320 men of the 1st Parachute Battalion led by Colonel Charles Laurent. Troops were ordered to seize the control tower and to block any access by road to the airport. The paratroopers made their way into Stanleyville to rescue hostages while the 5th Mechanised Brigade reached Wanie Rukula about 50km away. The two groups met up at 1000hrs at Camp Ketele.

In the meantime, the airfield had been prepared for the landing of more C-130s and the unloading of more men and equipment. Two DC-6s from 15 Wing took part in these operations and the evacuation of hostages to Leopoldville. Several thousand Congolese and 2,375 Europeans and other nationalities were rescued at Stanleyville (and Paulis on 26 November) over a period of three days. International pressure forced the Belgian paracommandos to leave on 28 November but, for now, Stanleyville was under the control of forces acting for the Congolese government.

Robert Feuillen (onboard radio operator):


PKC delivers supplies to local Congolese caught up in the fighting. This underlines the humanitarian nature of the FATAC's mission. (Author's collection)



Map illustrating the rescue missions carried out in late 1964. (Author's collection)

On November 16, two DC-6s left Melsbroek for Kamina, carrying military personnel who were to relieve colleagues at the end of their service with the FATAC. I was a member of the first DC-6 (KY-1) with Paul Fraipont as captain and André Haemers was the captain of the second aircraft (KY-3).

After a 25-hour flight, KY-1 was delayed again for a few days in Leopoldville due to technical problems. However, this delay allowed us to be given weapons by Lieutenant J.M. Jacquemart, a young officer in charge of cross servicing at N'Djili.

Finally arriving at Kamina on 22 November, the first thing we noticed was the number of USAF C-130s on the tarmac and in the hangers, one of which was full of paratroopers. Given orders to fly to Stanleyville and to take part in operation Red Dragon, at 04.00 on 24 November we were awakened by the sound of the C-130s taking off. We were put on stand-by from 09.00 and at 13.00 we left Kamina bound for Stanleyville. Though KY-1 maintained its usual cruising altitude, we were overtaken by KY-3 flying at a very low altitude below us. It maintained this altitude as it arrived over Stanleyville and made a so-called 'long, low approach' and it was hit by enemy fire by rebels occupying the left bank of the river and the village west of the runway. The aircraft was hit in its number 3 engine and with its oil tank pierced by machine gun rounds, it was grounded for repairs that were made the following day.

The activity at Stanleyville airfield was intense. The terminal was filled with civilians awaiting evacuation and all sorts of planes were taking off and landing. General Mobutu came to the airport for an update on the situation in a Beechcraft piloted by Lieutenant Colonel Bouzin. Around 18.30 as night fell, we loaded civilians on to the aircraft to transport them to Leopoldville. The engines started and as the aircraft was ready for take-off, the cabin and the cockpit were plunged into total darkness as only the essential instruments needed were lit. Paul Fraipont then positioned the

STOCK FUEL & AMMO
MOVEMENTS

The operations room at BAKA in October/November 1964. Seated left is Alain Blume of the FATAC, while front is Reginaldo Blanco of 22 Squadron FAC (Makasi). Centre, with cap, is Pachito Alvarez, also of the Makasi. Standing right are the co-pilot and pilot of a B-26 Invader. This photo illustrates the degree to which the various pro-government forces cooperated in the fight against the Simba. (Reginaldo Blanco collection)

The massacre of civilians held by the Simba began as soon as aircraft were heard over Stanleyville. (Author's collection)

Another photo of the operations room at BAKA. (Reginaldo Blanco collection).

U.S. AIR FORCE
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A USAF C-130 pictured at Simi-Simi Airfield, Stanleyville during operation Red Dragon. (Author's collection)

DC-6, powered the four engines to provide maximum thrust and at 19.00 he released the brakes. At that moment, the paratroopers lying in the grass along the runway opened a barrage of fire towards the canopies that form the limits of the airfield on either side. The gunfire even covered the noise of the engines and the tracer bullets illuminated the night. It was as if the plane was taking off through a firework display. It was an unforgettable and exhilarating sight.

Once we had reached a safe altitude and the lights in the cockpit and cabin were turned on, I contacted Melsbroek to advise 15 Wing command of our departure. I walked into the cabin to a couple sitting in the first row on the left and I asked them if there was a message they would like to pass on to their family in Belgium. On this, the man told me that he had been part of a group of 250 Europeans the Simba had taken to Simi-Simi to be used as human shields. However, as they reached Ketele Avenue, the Simba turned their machine guns on the civilians. The couple explained that two of their sons had been killed as they stood alongside them. I decided to inform the victims' families myself and returned to the cockpit in total shock.

Jean-Marie Jacquemart (technical officer):

N'Djili was chosen as the hub for the reception and repatriation of more than 2,000 freed hostages. An airlift had to be organised and the ANC command had appointed Major Coucke as the person in charge of flights. I was his deputy and in charge of technical support and cross servicing of the planes. From November 24 to 28, air traffic was particularly intense because of the rotation of many types of aircraft from different countries. The first of the dead began to arrive at N'Djili on November 25 in the middle of a flood of people rescued at Stanleyville and the next day, they were followed by the bodies of Belgian soldiers killed during the attack. Not being able to hold back my tears at this sight, worse was to come in the evening of 28 November when an Air Congo DC-4 landed at N'Djili and carried the bodies of nuns whose hearts had been ripped out by the Simba then eaten as it was believed the hearts of whites would give the Simba more strength. The bodies of the nuns were laid out in the hangar so that doctors working for the Red Cross could perform an autopsy. I will never forget the sight of these swollen bodies in their white clothes that had been cut up and were soaked in blood.

The End of the Ommegang

After the departure of the paracommandos, the rebels tried to reconquer the city. The positions held by the 5th Mechanised Brigade near the European quarters of Stanleyville came under constant attacks from Congolese quarters still in rebel hands. To relieve the pressure, it was decided to sweep the Belgian I, Mangombo and Brussels districts one after the other, then to establish and maintain a bridgehead on the left bank. These operations began on 3 December and two days later, 5th Brigade was in a position to cross the river and take control of Camp Prince Charles and the Belgian II district. The districts on the right bank were thoroughly searched and occupied by a battalion of the ANC.

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAISE
FG-697

Captured Simba rebels are held prisoner at Stanleyville. A Belgian paratrooper walks in front of the FATAC's FG-697. (Author's collection)

Medivac operations conducted by the FATAC during operation Red Dragon. (Author's collection)

The FATAC C-47 rescues priests and nuns from an area around Paulis during operation Red Dragon. (Author's collection)

Rescued hostages at N'Djili after evacuation from Stanleyville by USAF C-130s. (Author's collection)

On 27 November 1964, the last Belgian paratroopers who had taken part in Operations Red and Black Dragon (Paulis) returned to Belgium. The Belgian–American intervention was highly criticised by African nations, most of which had only a few years of independence. The airspace of these countries was closed to all Belgian military aircraft and the connection between Belgium and the Congo was temporarily complicated by aircraft having to travel via the Canary Islands (Las Palmas), Senegal (Dakar) and Nigeria (Lagos).

From Lagos, flights continued to Leopoldville along the African coast to the mouth of the Congo River. The journey from Melsbroek to Kamina took three days in total and when a flight was transporting weapons or ammunition the route had to be modified so that aircraft travelled through Portuguese colonies. In this case and after reaching Las Palmas, there was an overnight stopover in Sal in the Cape Verde with a flight to Leopoldville via São Tomé the following day. These were the same routes used by South African Airways to avoid a similar boycott placed on South Africa by African nations.

5

The Pacification of the Orientale Province, 1964–1965

In December 1964, the country was far from being fully pacified despite the deployment of government forces at Stanleyville and throughout eastern and central Congo. In effect, Simba were still active in certain areas of Stanleyville and some could be found holed up in small villages around the city. With no intention of ceding the capital of the 'People's Republic of the Congo', the symbolic home of Patrice Lumumba and 'Lumumbism', the rebels did everything in their power to take back control. Frequent attacks at night were made on Camp Ketele, Stanleyville's main garrison and aircraft, including those of the FATAC, were the target for random firing from outlying pockets of rebel soldiers.

Although Stanleyville was cleared of most rebel activity by 9 December, operations involving government forces to quell other areas of the Congo continued well into 1965. These operations focused on the areas around Paulis Buta and Bumba. The FATAC continued its role of providing logistical support to the ANC with mercenary units comprising veterans from a large variety of nations, looking to offer their skills. One such soldier was Major Siegfried Müller, a veteran of the Wehrmacht who proudly wore his Iron Cross throughout his time in the Congo. He commanded a series of operations around Paulis in February 1965, as testified by FATAC officers involved in providing back-up. They were called to a friendly-fire incident that involved Müller's unit and a B-26 of 22 Squadron.

Alain Blume (pilot and operations officer):

> On 6 February 1965, after barely 30 kilometres of driving from Stanleyville to Paulis, Muëller's column was ambushed. The new tanker and its trailer were riddled with bullets and burst into flames and two soldiers were seriously injured. We received the order to evacuate them by helicopter but our H-21 (FG-697) had already been hit several times, some bullets going through the rotor blades and other damaging the landing gear.
>
> That morning, I had done a forty-minute flight test to make sure that the aircraft was functioning more or less normally and since I was wary of the solidity of the rotor blades, I had decided to use the aircraft only in case of extreme necessity. The injuries were so serious that I took the decision to ignore my limited experience on H-21s and to head out to the rescue site as quickly as possible. My co-pilot, J.M. Dupont, was an F-84F pilot whom I had known at Florennes Air Base. He had no experience on helicopters but acted as a source of moral on the way to the rescue. We reached the landing zone after around 20 minutes. I realised that the tall trees around the clearing would not make the approach easy but somehow, I managed to land the helicopter. As the rebels continued to fire it seemed like an eternity before the wounded were on board.
>
> To take off, I signalled with large gestures that the runway had to be cleared and let the helicopter accelerate to 45 knots, fortunately without hitting the trees. After a 30-minute flight to Stanleyville, I gently guided the helicopter to the ground like an airplane and taxied to the parking lot. The ambulances were ready to take the injured to the hospital. One of the two who

Nuns, priests and Christian missionaries were the main beneficiaries of rescue operations organised by the FATAC. Though in danger of being killed by the Simba, the thought of being disturbed by helicopters during an afternoon 'nap' with nuns, upset some of the priests. (Author's collection)

was hit in the spine survived for two days, the other stayed alive thanks to our quick intervention.

The events according to Auguste Janssens (flight engineer):

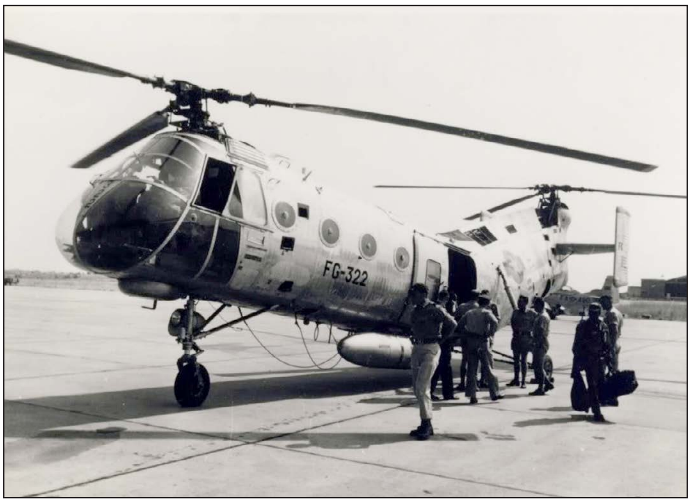
In early February 1965, the 9T-PKF was one of the first C-47s that landed at Paulis airfield after Operation Black Dragon. Our crew consisted of C. Vingerhoets as captain, A. Parmentier as navigator and co-pilot, E. Deroeck as flight radio and me as flight mechanic. As soon as the equipment and food for the mercenaries and the sisters of the local mission were unloaded, we could return to Stanleyville, our home port. Because the runway was not yet fully secured and the rebels were still in the vicinity of the airfield, C. Vingerhoets decided to wait another day before starting the return flight.

Flight engineer Auguste Janssens (third from left) leans on an armed jeep during operations around Paulis in early 1965. (Auguste Janssens collection)

A German man who introduced himself to us as Mini Schmidt, picked us up from the plane with his heavily armed jeep. While our C-47 was being unloaded, I had a conversation with Mini in his jeep. Suddenly, I saw some Simbas appear at the edge of the airfield. He drove straight at them but I had no choice but to sit at the machine gun mounted on the jeep. The crews of the Belgian Air Force were not very familiar with the handling of weapons but I had to learn very quickly. I was shooting at the targets indicated by Mini Schmidt. He would swear at me and yell at me to speed up the rate of fire by pulling on the trigger for a longer time.

We got to know Schmidt better at his quarters and he told us he was a former legionnaire and could not return to his country because an international arrest warrant had been issued against him for stealing and selling two trucks of weapons and ammunition. He had an explosive and irascible character and was known as "trigger happy". He had already been injured five times, three of them in Algeria.

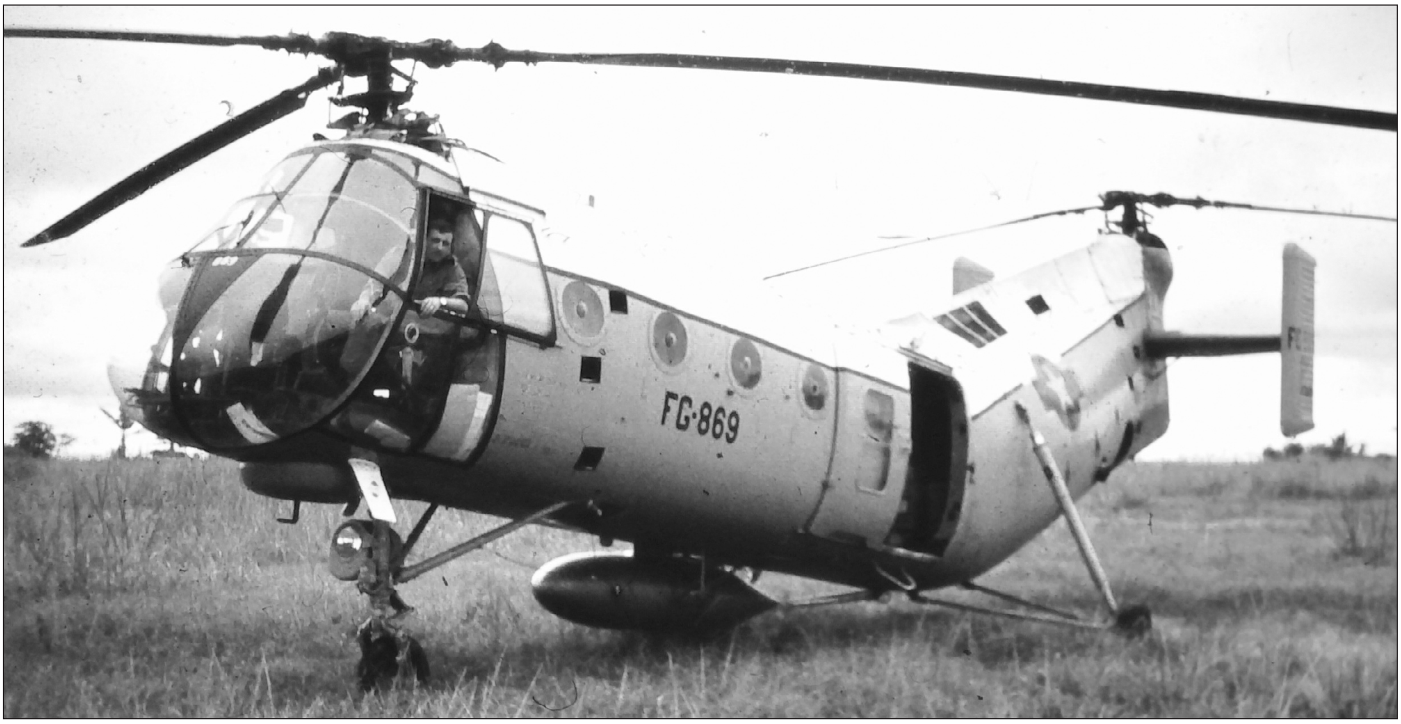
The next day the area was safe again and we took off for Stanleyville. The place was swarming with Cuban, Rhodesian and South African mercenaries.



FG-322 was another H-21 that suffered damage on 10 February 1965. Operated by Warrant Officers G. Hoes and J. Peeters during an evacuation of wounded at Wamba, the aircraft's rotors hit trees and was abandoned after setting fire on the spot. (Author's collection)

In addition to transporting ANC soldiers and mercenaries, one of our frequent cargos was gold bars. They were stowed in the most appropriate places to avoid possible detection on landing and the bars were loaded on to the aircraft by local natives in exchange for a pack of cigarettes and to the rhythm of a drum banged by the local chieftain. The gold ingots being the size of a brick, three tons of gold did not take up much space but it took a lot of persuasion to convince the local ANC or mercenary officer that although there was plenty of room left, the plane had reached its maximum loading weight. The remaining gold had to be transported with the next aircraft.

As well as the evacuation of wounded mercenaries, in February 1965 the FATAC was called upon to rescue nuns and priests caught up in the fighting and had been the target of Simba fighters. Their

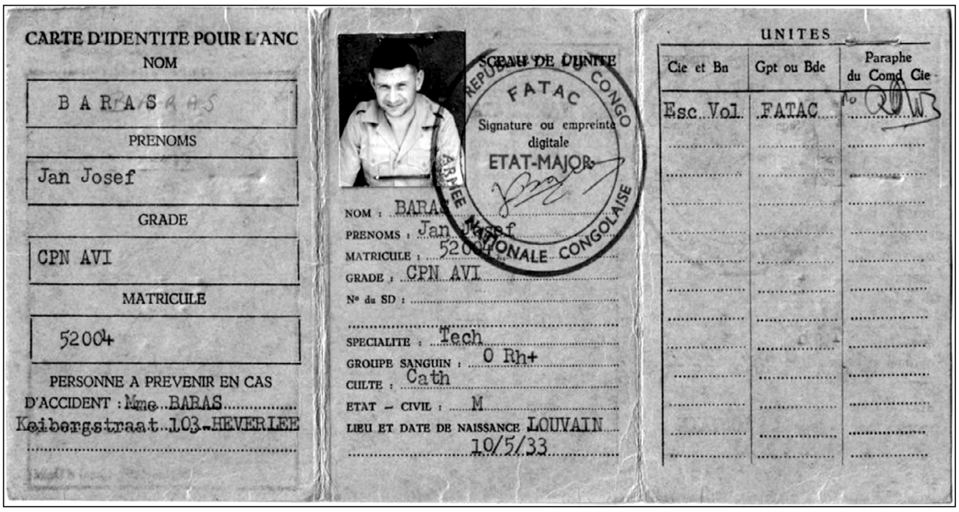


From September 1964, the FATAC's H-21s flew around 600 hours evacuating freed hostages or wounded from the battlefield. FG-869 was one helicopter taking part in these operations. Suffering damage at Paulis on 25 January 1965 when rotor blades hit the fuselage, the aircraft could not be repaired and was sold to a scrap dealer in Kamina. This was the first of a series of accidents that saw all six of the FATAC's H-21 withdrawn from service. (Author's collection)

missions were situated between Lisala and Bumba but the attacks did not prevent FATAC personnel Edgard Brokken and Allaeys, from flying into zones of rebel activity.

Edgard Brokken:

> We regularly made rescue flights from Lisala to pick up people in the bush. A father from the nearby mission asked us not to fly in the early afternoon because the priests were having an afternoon nap. One afternoon I decided to spy on the fathers to see if this was true and around 3 o'clock a priest came out of a building accompanied by an Africa nun. A second priest, also accompanied by a black nun, came out of a second building and I wondered if we had really had to interrupt our rescue missions for the reason given. Nonetheless, the next day we took off at the time when they were having their "afternoon nap"!



CARTE D'IDENTITE POUR L'ANC

NOM

B A R A S

PRENOMS

Jan Josef

GRADE

CPN AVI

MATRICULE

52004

PERSONNE A PREVENIR EN CAS D'ACCIDENT : Mme BARAS
Keibergstraat 103 HEVERLEE

SCEAU DE L'UNITE

FATAC

Signature ou empreinte digitale

ETAT-MAJOR

NOM : BARA
PRENOMS : Jan Josef
MATRICULE : 5200
GRADE : CPN AVI
Nº du SD :
SPECIALITE : Tech
GROUPE SANGUIN : 0 Rh+
CULTE : Cath
ETAT – CIVIL : M
LIEU ET DATE DE NAISSANCE LOUVAIN 10/5/33

UNITES

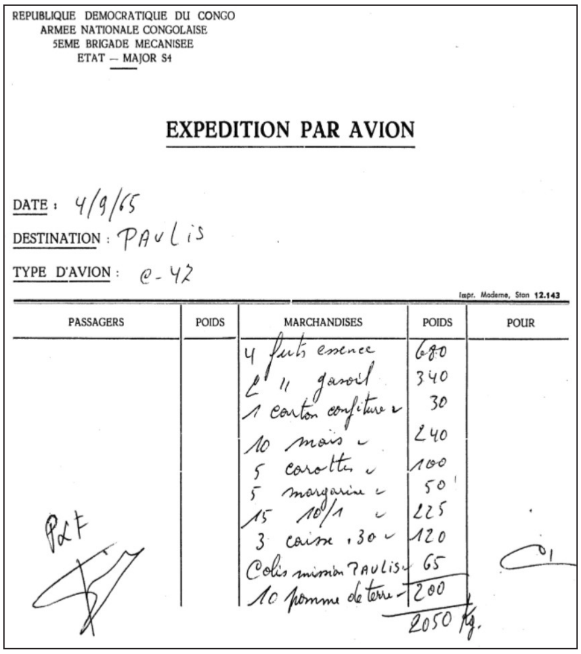
Cie et Bn	Gpt ou Bde	Paraphe du Comd Cie
Esc. Vol	FATAC	

The ANC identity card of Jan Josef Barras. Born in 1933, Barras began his career as an air traffic controller at Kleine-Brogel Air Base. He was sent to the United States to study navigation in 1959 and subsequently, he flew for three years on a CF-100 Canuck at Beauvechain. Barras was transferred to 15 Wing in 1963. (Jean Barras' collection)

The Rescue of Dick Holm as told by Jan Baras, Dick Holm and Paul Van Casteren

Jan Baras:

> We left Melsbroek in the afternoon of 13 January 1965 on board a DC-6 bound for Kamina. As the plane was fully loaded it was going to be a long trip and another thing was that because of its cargo, we had to stop to refuel on the way. We were forbidden from flying over some African countries due to Tshombe's unpopular decision to use mercenaries to fight the Simba, so our route was Seville in Spain, Las Palmas in the Canary Islands, Dakar, Senegal and Lagos, Nigeria. We landed here on 14 January 1965 for a last refuelling and to spend the night. We set off the next day and headed for Leopoldville and on 16 January we reached BAKA.
>
> There was a lot of activity at the base but we didn't have much time to familiarise ourselves with the base because the next day we were already due to leave on a mission. Our crew had already been designated before leaving Melsbroek and it comprised pilot Bernard Cruysmans, me as navigator, Jacques Fraipont as the radio operator and flight engineer Lucien Lenoir.
>
> Our first mission was to go on a so-called "milk run", which consisted of taking supplies to mercenaries and ANC troops stationed in Kabalo, Kongolo and Kindu. They liked to see us arrive as with road and rail links cut off, they were totally dependent on air transport for their supplies. This type of mission was not straightforward as government forces were only placed at strategic points such as round junctions or airfields. The number of mercenaries was insufficient



REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO
ARMEE NATIONALE CONGOLAISE
5EME BRIGADE MECANISEE
ETAT — MAJOR S4

EXPEDITION PAR AVION

DATE : 4/9/65
DESTINATION : PAULIS
TYPE D'AVION : C-47

Impr. Moderne, Stan 12.143

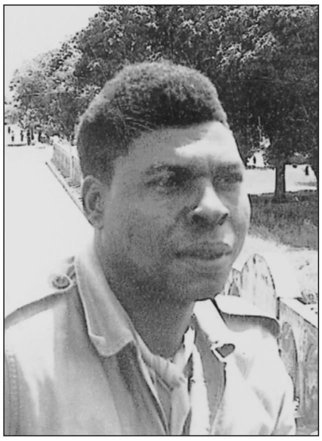
PASSAGERS	POIDS	MARCHANDISES	POIDS	POUR
		4 futs essence	680	
		2 " gasoil	340	
		1 carton confiture "	30	
		10 maïs "	240	
		5 carottes "	100	
		5 margarine "	50	
		15 10/1 "	225	
		3 caisse, 30 "	120	
		Colis mission PAULIS "	65	
		10 pomme de terre "	200	
			2050 Kg.	

So-called 'milk runs' reflected the banality of some FATAC operations. Indeed, this document shows that a FATAC C-47 was called upon to deliver everyday items such as corn (maïs), jam (confiture), margarine, carrots and potatoes (pommes de terre) to soldiers of the 5th Mechanised Brigade based at Paulis. (Author's collection)

Richard 'Dick' Holm is pictured in Laos in 1962 with a Hmong resistance fighter. Subsequently, Holm was transferred to the CIA's Africa Section. He arrived in the Congo in December 1964. (Dick Holm collection)

to guard the areas in between these strategic points, so these were usually controlled by rebel forces. Before landing, therefore, it was advisable to circle the landing zone a few times to detect enemy presence.

After about 10 days flying, we knew the context very well and were transferred to Leopoldville. Here, there were problems with rebels crossing the Congo River from Congo-Brazzaville and we were to be used as back-up flying from N'Kolo, a small, soggy airfield near the Congo River, a good hour's flight from N'Djili. By 8 February, the situation around Leopoldville was under control. We were sent back to BAKA to pick up our kit, then we were sent to Stanleyville. Except for this city, Paulis, Bunia, Goma and Bukavu, the north-eastern part of Congo was still occupied by the rebels so air communication between these cities was therefore of the utmost importance.



Faustino, the village chief who came to the rescue of Dick Holm and Juan Peron in February 1965. (Holm/Peron collection)

Juan C. Peron (left) pictured at Bunia in 1965. To his left, 'Big Bill' Wyrozemski, a Polish WIGMO flyer. (Juan Peron collection)

Over the coming days we flew almost daily from Stanleyville to Paulis and back. We alternated with flights to Bukavu via Kamembe to ensure that all areas were being supplied and on 16 February we had to return to Kamina for an inspection of our C-47. It turned out that our plane had technical issues, so on 19 February we left once more for N'Djili aboard another C-47 that we had to deliver. We returned to Stanleyville as passengers on board an American C-130.

In early February 22 Squadron of the FAC was operating a large number of reconnaissance missions in north-eastern Congo. This was because the rebels were being supplied through Sudan and were using the country as an operational base, on 17 February two T-28s left Bunia to conduct a mission. The T-28s piloted by Juan Peron and Juan Tunon respectively, the passenger aboard Peron's aircraft was Richard Holm of the CIA.

Richard Holm is Rescued

Situated some 380km north-east of Stanleyville, Paulis had recently seen the arrival of Jan Baras and Paul Van Casteren. Like Baras, Van Casteren trained as an air traffic controller at Coxyde and in 1959, was sent to the United States to study navigation. He earned his Silver Wings in 1954, also in the United States and flew Republic F-84G and F-84 Thunderbird jets at Kleine-Brogel.

His recollection of the incident of 17 February 1964 was that two T-28s had been reported missing and that rescue operations had been implemented almost immediately. The north-east of the Congo

A Profile of Dick Holm, CIA Field Officer

After two years service in Laos and Thailand, Holm was assigned to the CIA's Africa Section and very soon was to find himself assigned to the Congo. Arriving in Stanleyville on 26 December 1964, on 12 February he travelled to Bunia, 30km west of Lake Albert in the then, Oriental Province. In Bunia, Holm met up with the two Cuban pilots and enquired about the possibility of joining them on a mission. His wish was granted on 17 February when Peron and Tunon were sent to carry out armed reconnaissance aimed at identifying the positions and supply lines of the Simbas who had retreated and were operating out of bases in Sudan.[1] Holm took his seat in the T-28 flown by Peron, a former crop-sprayer turned WIGMO pilot. The two T-28s patrolled the area and observed tracks they believed were used by the Simba. Both planes attacked using rockets and machine gun fire but as the pilots turned to head for their base at Bunia, bad weather set in leading the pilots to become lost. Eventually, the pilots lost sight of each other and were forced to make crash-landings in the bush as they had run out of fuel.

As Holm had no confidence in parachutes, Peron opened the canopy of the T-28 so that both could jump from the aircraft as soon as it had landed. Peron being able to escape quickly and safely, Holm had made the mistake of lifting the visor on his helmet. The landing was rough with the aircraft stopping abruptly after hitting a tree. The left fuel tank of the aircraft ruptured and the cockpit was sprayed with burning fuel as Holm attempted to extricate himself. With the plane beginning to burn, the first thing Holm felt was a sharp pain on the left side of his face and his eyelids fusing together. Instinctively, Holm pulled himself from the burning aircraft and falling on to its right wing, he was pulled to safety by Peron. As the aircraft burst into flames, both got as far away as possible from the wreckage.

The pair found themselves on the edge of a stream but were in grave danger as they had no emergency radio and had not told anyone of their whereabouts. Peron confirmed to Holm that he was badly injured but without the means to contact the base both decided to take shelter under some trees as it had begun to rain.

After a sleepless and painful night for Holm, in the morning Peron set off to survey the area with Holm's pistol in hand. A few hours later, Peron was fortunate enough to encounter some natives who then led him back to their village to meet the chief; a highly uncertain encounter given that natives were prone to killing enemy captives very slowly before eating them often still alive. Peron was lucky to have stumbled upon some friendly villagers whose chief even spoke a few words of English.

Another factor acting in Peron's favour was that the chief, Faustino, came from Bitima, a village 10 miles from the Sudanese border and a settlement that had been attacked by the Simba. The rebels had killed Faustino's brother so he was happy to help anyone prepared to get rid of them. It turned out that a second villager had seen Tunon's craft fall from the sky. Eventually, the villager located the wreckage but unfortunately, there was no sign of Tunon. It later transpired that Tunon had been captured by the Simba who killed him before mutilating his body. It was recovered and returned to the United States for proper burial.

While Peron left to scout the area, Holm was left under the tree trying his best to remain conscious. He felt thousands of insects attacking his burnt flesh and to ease the pain and rid the insects, he dipped his face in the stream. When Peron returned almost 24 hours after the crash, Holm was propped against a tree covered in bees. Resembling a 'monster' in Peron's words, villagers put Holm on a hastily constructed stretcher and took him to a hiding place around a kilometre from the village.

The fear being that Holm and Peron would be captured by the Simba, the village witchdoctor was the first to treat Holm's wounds. The shaman's first task being to remove the insects, some had laid eggs in the cuts in Holm's face. Having then grown into thousands of worms, they had to be dug out using a knife. The wounds were then coated in a lotion to keep the insects away, a lotion that turned out to be made from snake fat. This saved Holm's life.

With no means of communication, it was decided that the best course of action was to head for Paulis, the closest friendly city around 210km away. The trek by Peron, Faustino and two villagers to Paulis was made from 19 February occasionally on bicycles whenever the terrain permitted it.

Although Peron still does not understand how the four cyclists managed to cross hundreds of kilometres of Congolese bush without running into Simba rebels, they did encounter friendly villagers who gave them food and water. In the afternoon of 25 February 1965, travelling downstream by canoe, the men reached a forward post some 30km from Paulis occupied by soldiers of the Ommegang. Four jeeps took the men into Paulis the next day and it was from this point that the rescue of Dick Holm could be organised.

covering thousands of square miles, the task of locating the downed aircraft proved to be like finding a needle in a haystack. Baras and Van Casteren had no indication of where the aircraft could have landed and despite making several reconnaissance flights, there was no sign of Peron, Holm or Tunon.

Interviewed by Wilfred De Brouwer in 2014, both Baras and Van Casteren recall that Peron had made a report to FATAC chief Lieutenant Colonel Jan Vandepoel after having made his way through the bush from the crash site. Being in Paulis purely by chance, Vandepoel immediately began rescue operations to save Holm's life. He asked American authorities to send a C-130 from Stanleyville to Paulis to be ready for a possible medivac and gave the order for the two H-21s plus two T-28s to be on stand-by.

The four aircraft were joined by a C-47 sent from BAKA and the rescue mission was launched on 25 February at 15:00. Holm was in a zone still swarming with Simba rebels and as the role of the T-28s was to protect the helicopters, the C-47 (9T-PKE) had been transformed into a gunship by placing a machine gun (operated by Warrant Officer Marc Carlier) in the rear door-opening.

Vandepoel was aboard the C-47 with Baras as navigator and the plane piloted by Bernard Cruysmans. The FG-677 was piloted by Gilbert Lechat and Van Casteren and FG-697, piloted by Franciscus 'Susse' Hoes and J. Peeters. The village chief Faustino, the two other villagers and a doctor were also part of the rescue team and were aboard FG-677. As for Peron, he took a place in the back of one of theT-28s. FG-697 had to turn back shortly after take-off due to mechanical problems.

Faustino guided FG-677 to the crash site but the rescue mission became more problematic when this H-21 also encountered engine issues. A single-engine craft, its approach was too low meaning

Both FG-677 and FG-697 operated out of Paulis some 380km north-east of Stanleyville serial. (Author's collection)

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOL
FG-697

The H-21 registered FG-697 operating in less dramatic conditions than those faced during the rescue of Dick Holm. The 'Flying banana' transports 'flying bananas'. (Author's collection)

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLA
FG-697

The crew of FG-697. (Author's collection)

that it could not autorotate and the landing itself was violent. The H-21 tipped on its side but only the doctor was slightly hurt in the accident.

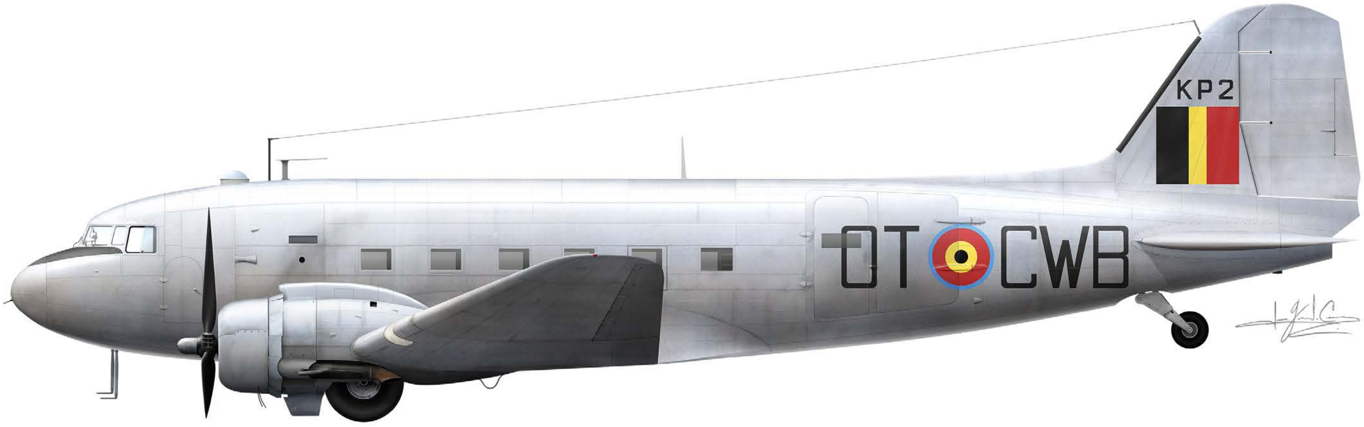
FG-697 had been repaired and was on its way to the crash site. Once it arrived, Van Casteren saw that Holm was in a dreadful state. Now unconscious, the snake fat that covered Holm's wounds had hardened and turned black and gave off an awful smell. With the Belgians not giving much chance of Holm surviving the ordeal and Van Casteren putting his rosary beads around the injured man's neck, FG-697 arrived in the village at dusk. Holm was then transported and placed in the C-47; the aircraft had to leave immediately as it was not equipped for night flying.

Paulis, moreover, was not equipped for night landings. Fortune was on the side of Holm as the weather conditions were good and the sky clear enough to spot flares placed at regular intervals throughout the journey back to base. By the time 9T-PKE arrived back at Paulis, the C-130 had made its way from Stanleyville ready to transport Holm to hospital. He had been administered the last rites by a Catholic priest even though he was not of this faith and with doctors estimating his chances of survival at just 30 percent, it did not appear that Holm would live for much longer.

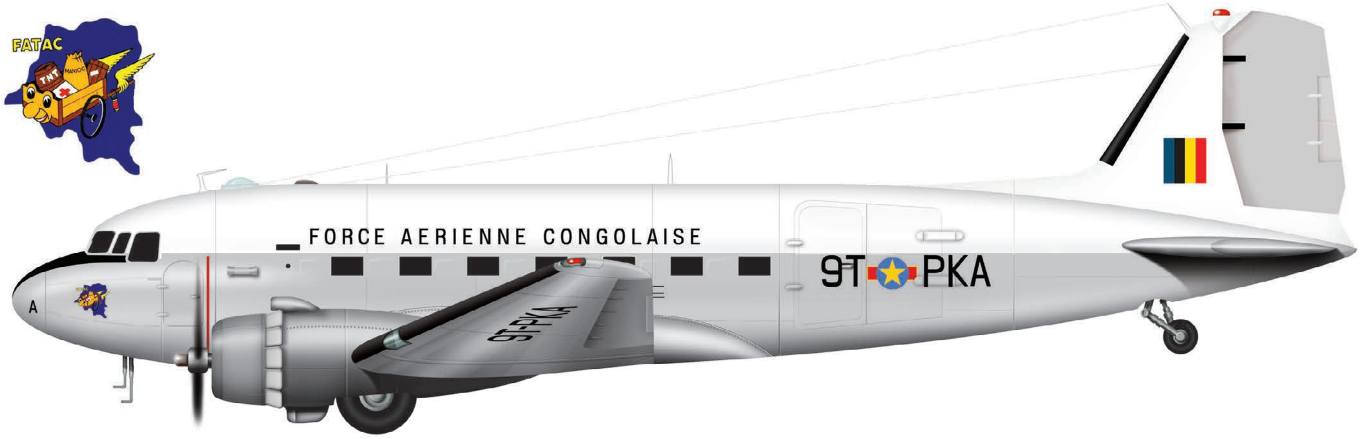
US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara, having learnt of Holm's condition, had ordered a Boeing 707 carrying a special burns unit be dispatched to the Congo. The aircraft picked up Holm from Leopoldville and only 36 hours after a C-47 had taken him from the crash site, he was being treated at the US Army's burns unit in San Antonio, Texas. Though he lost an eye and underwent years of treatment, Holm survived his ordeal and went on to serve the CIA for 31 more years.

Clearing the Border Region

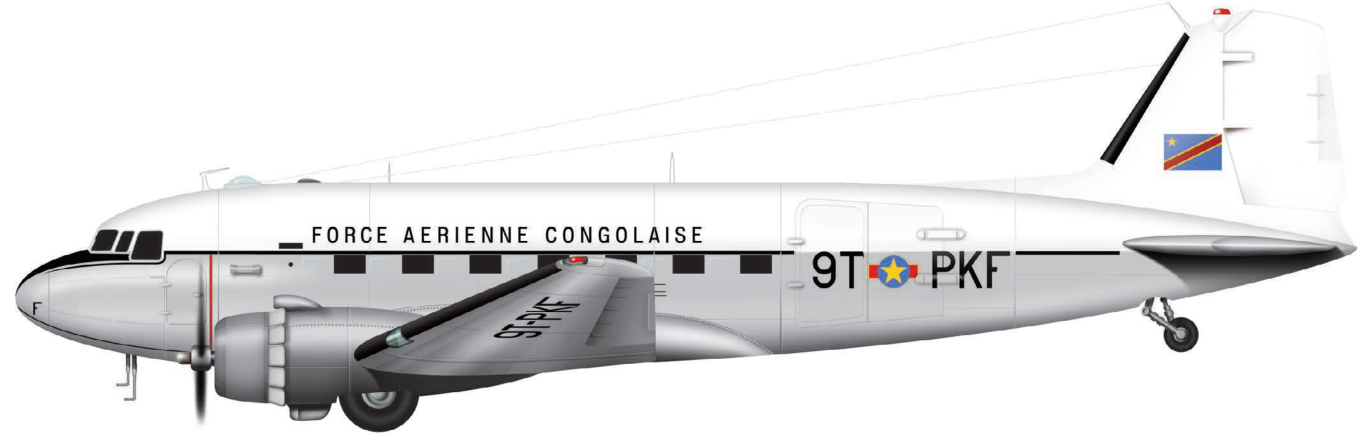
After the setbacks of the past few months, the Simba had pulled back to areas bordering Sudan, Uganda, Burundi and Tanzania to continue the rebellion. Mike Hoare's 5 Commando left Bunia on 15 March 1965 to address the situation along the Congolese border with Sudan and Uganda. His column was supplied by four C-47s stationed in Bunia, an H-21 was piloted by Edouard Boutet and Gilbert Lechat was to conduct the evacuation of any injured. This service was not extended to the Simba who were either shot or taken prisoner. The Simba that were captured were taken back to Bunia to face a war council composed of mercenaries and ANC officers.



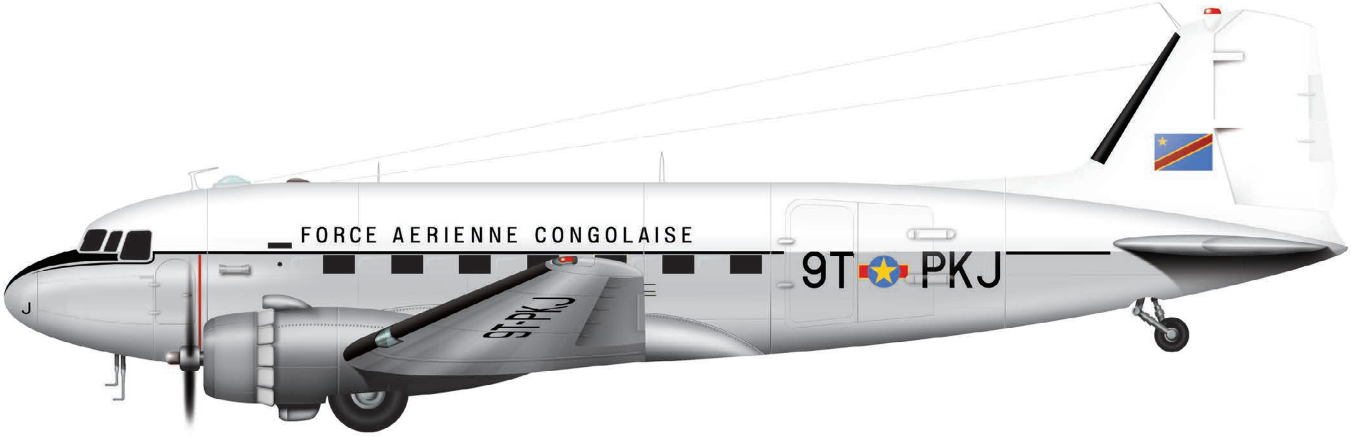
Starting in 1953, Belgium acquired a total of six Douglas C-47B Skytrains and one Dakota IV for the transport wing in the Belgian Congo: most of these were purchased through America's Foreign Liquidation Commission – essentially an authority responsible to liquidate surplus military material left in Europe after the Second World War. This example, the C-47B K-2/KP-2 (originally 43-49240 of the USAF) was on loan from SABENA when making a forced landing, on 13 September 1953, after which it was written off and its fuselage used for training paratroopers at Kolwezi. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



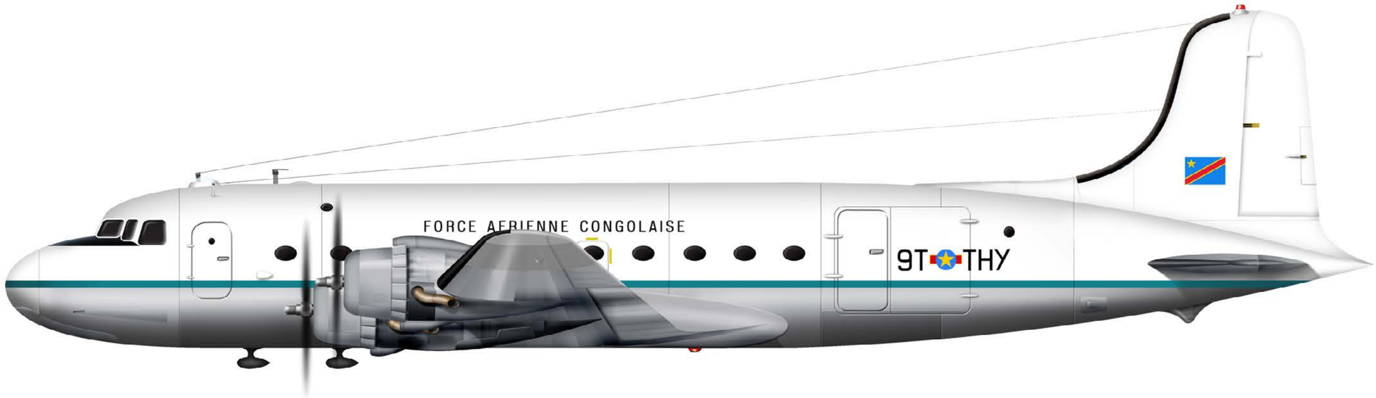
There were no less than two C-47s serving with the FATAC that wore the registration 9T-PKA. The first – the former 43-15661 – was delivered to N'Djili Airport on 12 June 1964. After having suffered irreparable damage in an accident on 2 October 1964, it was cannibalised for spare parts. The second 9T-PKA – the former 43-15649 – was delivered to N'Djili on 31 August 1965. It was operated by the FATAC from May to June 1966 and then handed over to the Force Aérienne Congolaise (FAC), in July 1966. Insert shown is the insignia of the FATAC, including a cart loaded with TNT, medical supplies and manioc, against the background of the map of Congo in blue. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



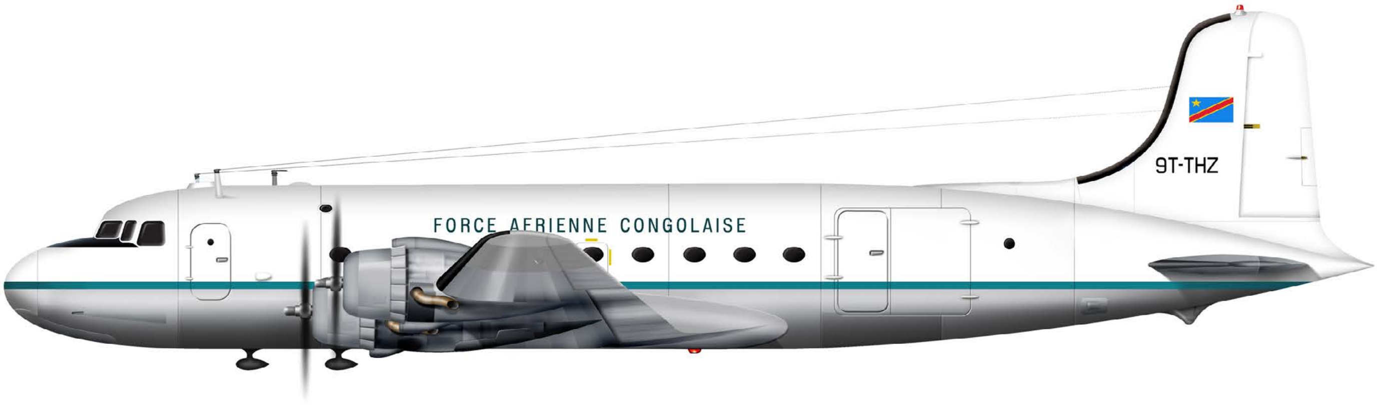
This Douglas C-47 – the former 43-48255 – was delivered to N'Djili in early 1965. It served with the FATAC until June 1967, when it was transferred to the FAC. The venerable aircraft remained in service at least until August 1975, when it was used by Holden Roberto of the FNLA during the Angolan Civil War. Eventually, it was withdrawn from service in October of the same year and then stored at N'Djili International. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



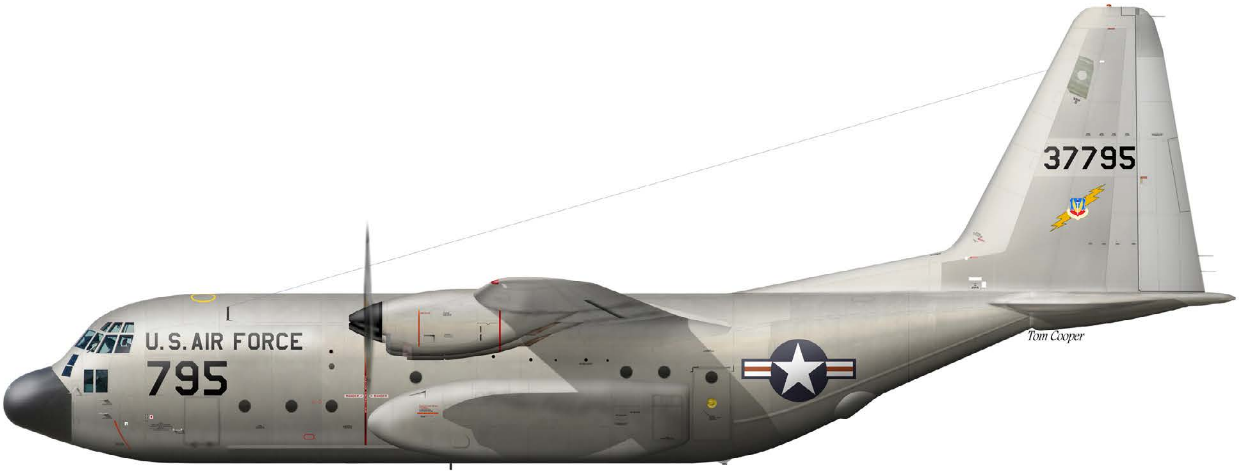
The Douglas C-47 Skytrain 9T-PKJ – the former 43-48255 – was delivered to N'Djili Airport in early 1965. Initially, it was operated by Air Congo before being transferred to FATAC and then requisitioned by mercenaries in Stanleyville of June 1967. After the so-called 'Mercenary Revolt' of that year, it was recovered and pressed into service with the Force Aérienne Congolaise and then the Zairian Air Force which operated it until 1973. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



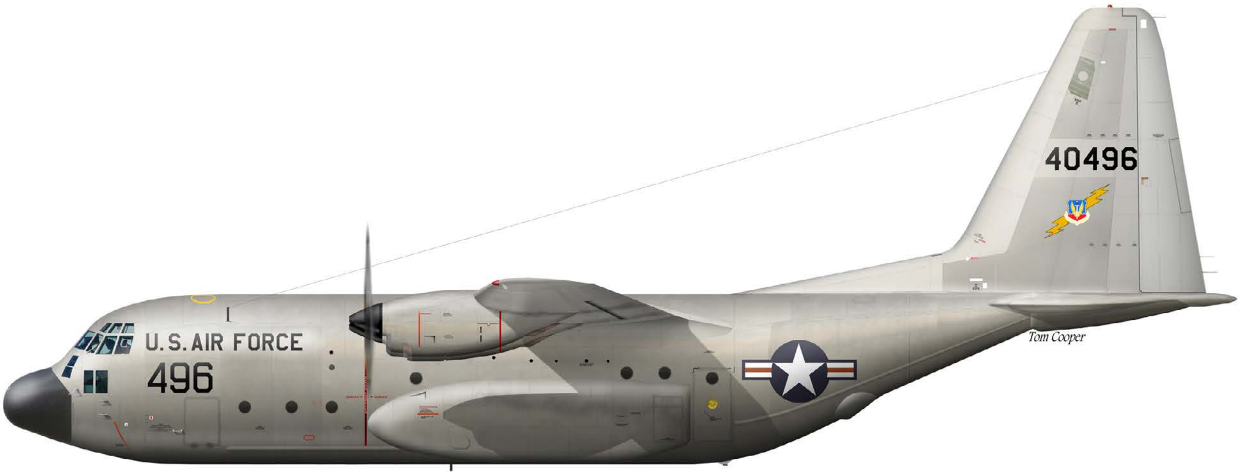
The FATAC-operated aircraft registered as 9T-THY was a Douglas C-54 Skymaster, the former 42-72507. After serving with the US Air Force and the Portuguese Air Force, it was delivered to N'Djili on 30 January 1965: starting on 10 February 1965 and until 1967, it was alternatively operated by the FATAC and the Force Aérienne Congolaise. 9T-THY was retired from service in 1975 and scrapped. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



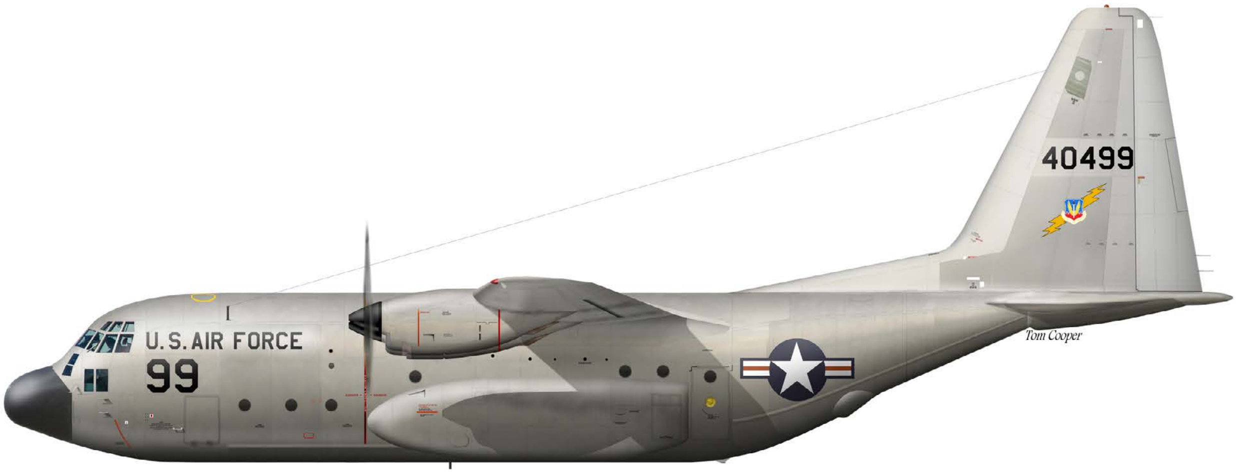
The Douglas C-54 Skymaster registered as 9T-THZ, was the former 42-72341 of the USAF which also saw service with the Portuguese Air Force. It was delivered to N'Djili Airport in February 1965 and then operated alternatively by the FATAC and the Force Aérienne Congolaise before being transferred permanently to the FAC in 1967. Seriously damaged in an incident in 1974, it was withdrawn from service and then scrapped. (Artwork by Leon Manoucherians)



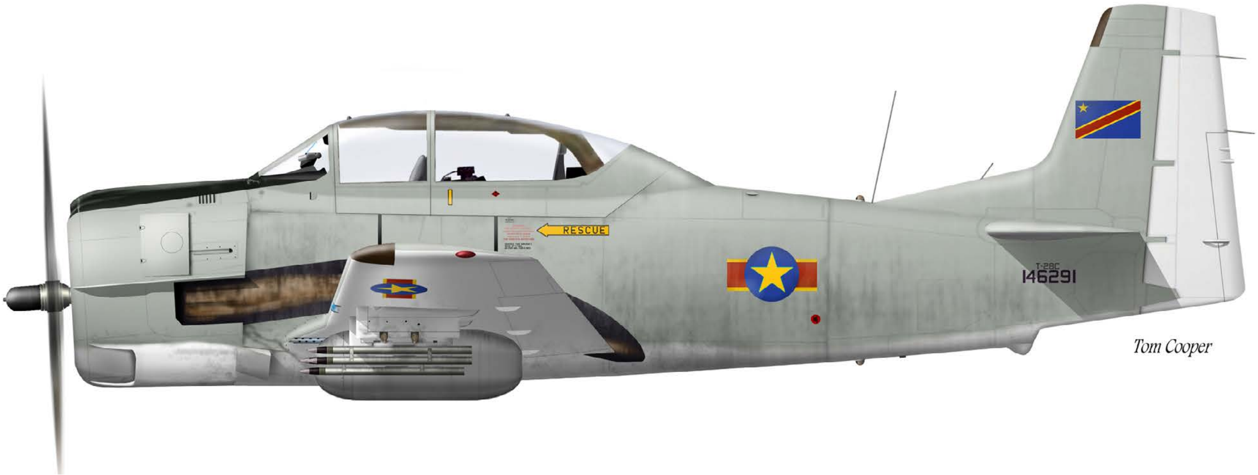
Established in February 1953, the 464th Troop Carrier Wing initially flew Fairchild C-123 Providers and was involved in the Project Mule Train, in Vietnam, starting in 1962. In 1963–1964, its three units – the 776th, 777th, and 778th Troop Carrier Squadrons – were re-equipped with Lockheed C-130E Hercules. Therefore, the wing already had some experience in supporting expeditionary and special forces operations at the time. It was ordered to detach four C-130Es for the mission to rescue state department personnel from Stanleyville in 1964. Contrary to USAF C-130A/Bs involved in supporting UN operations of 1960 (which had large parts of their fins and rear fuselage painted in bright red), C-130Es of the 464th TCW, were left in bare metal overall. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



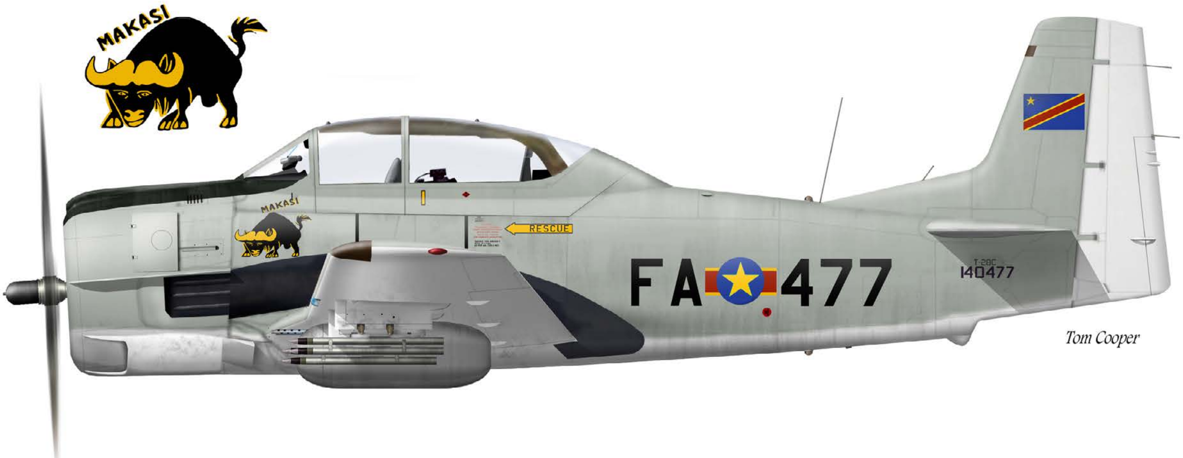
At the time of Operation Dragon Rouge, the 776th and 777th TCS of the 464th Troop Carrier Squadron were forward deployed at Evreux AB in France and were serving on a temporary duty with the 322nd Air Division. As such, they were conveniently positioned to help airlift Belgian forces. This is how it came about that the commitment of the 464th TCW in the Congo, quickly grew from four to 14 aircraft and these not only dropped Belgian paratroopers into Stanleyville but also, once the runways were cleared, landed additional troops at Simi-Simi Airport. As soon as Stanleyville was secured, C-130Es began flying refugees out, usually carrying 100 passengers on each flight. Eventually, the Hercules evacuated between 2,500 and 3,000 civilians. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



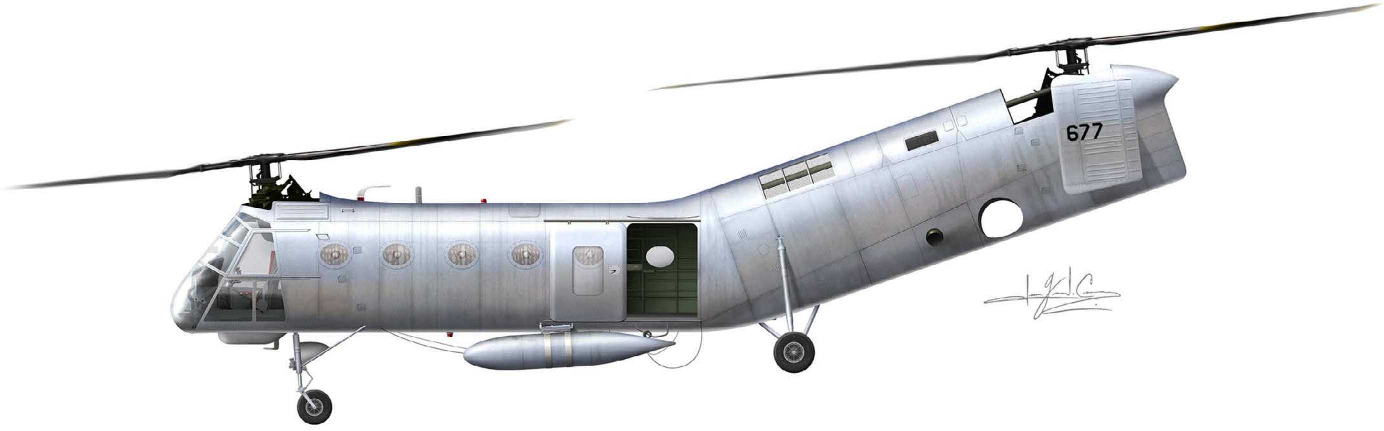
As usual for the time, all the C-130Es involved in Operation Dragon Rouge wore little in terms of insignia, except for the 'last five' of their serial on the fin and the 'last three' of the serial on the forward fuselage. All had the crest of the 322nd Air Division applied on the fin, across a yellow bolt. The font in which the FY-serials were applied on the fin was always the standardised 'Amarillo USAF' but the way the last three digits were applied on the forward fuselage, varied from aircraft to aircraft. C-130Es of the 464th TCW regularly came under fire on take-offs from Simi-Simi and Pauli and five are known to have been damaged during operations in the Congo. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



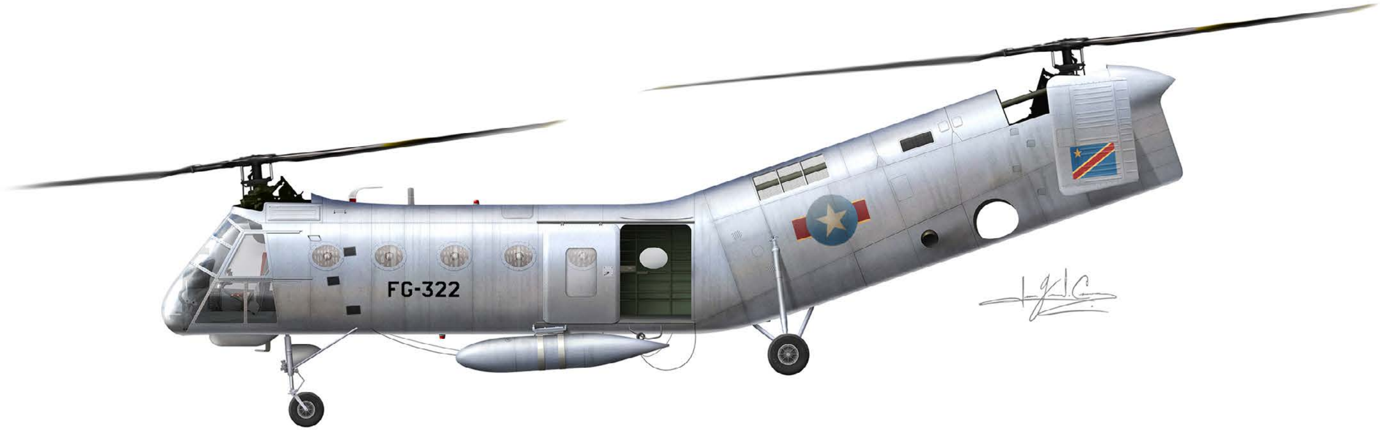
Generally, the FATAC's primary role was of transport and utility nature. However, a number of its pilots went on to serve with the Makasi – the CIA-recruited force mainly comprising Cuban exiles. Primary combat type of the Makasi was the North American T-28 Trojan, dozens of which were supplied by the USA in the mid-1960s. This example, BuNo 146291, was a T-28C delivered to the Congo in August 1964. Like most of the fleet, it was painted in light gull grey (FS 36440) on top surfaces and sides and insignia white (FS 17875) on undersides and – at least initially – wore no insignia whatsoever. By February 1965, it received the roundels on the rear fuselage and fin flashes. During the same month, this aircraft crash landed near the Sudanese border after running out of fuel. The pilot, Juan Peron, survived but the passenger, CIA operative Richard Holm, was badly burnt. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



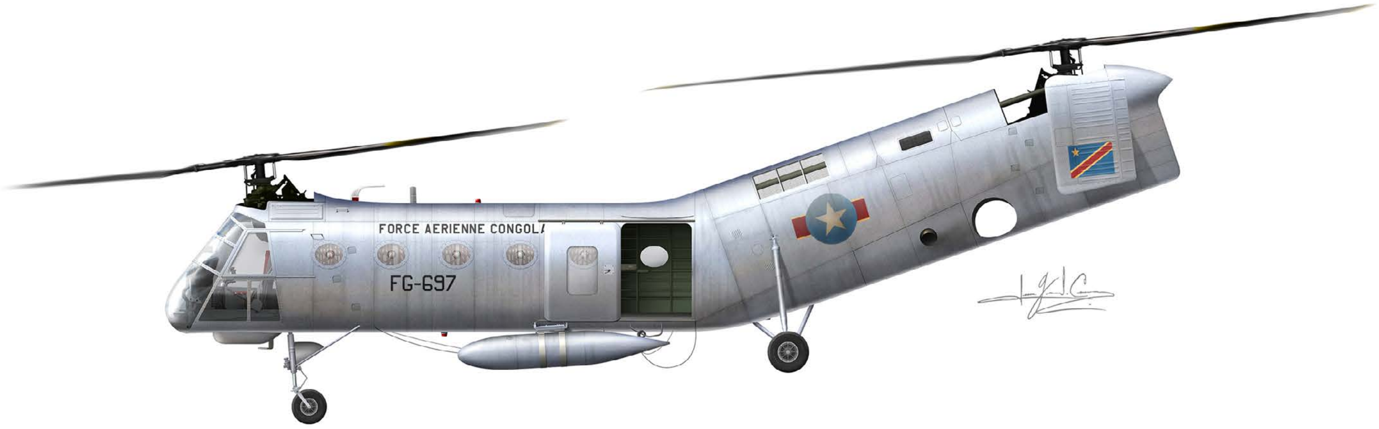
This T-28C – BuNo 140477 – was delivered to the Congo on 27 May 1964 and survived its service with the Makasi long enough to receive the full Congolese insignia and serial number FA 477. It also had the initial version of the famous Makasi insignia: a 'raging bull' in black and yellow, applied below the front portion of the cockpit. Applied through the first half of 1965, this was based on the local beer brand. The aircraft is shown with standard armament of this period, including a pod for a 7.62mm machine gun on the inboard underwing pylon and a quadruple launcher for unguided rockets, calibre 68mm. The 477 survived its service with the Makasi and was subsequently handed over to the FAC but written off in late 1968, following a take-off accident at Albertville. (Artwork by Tom Cooper)



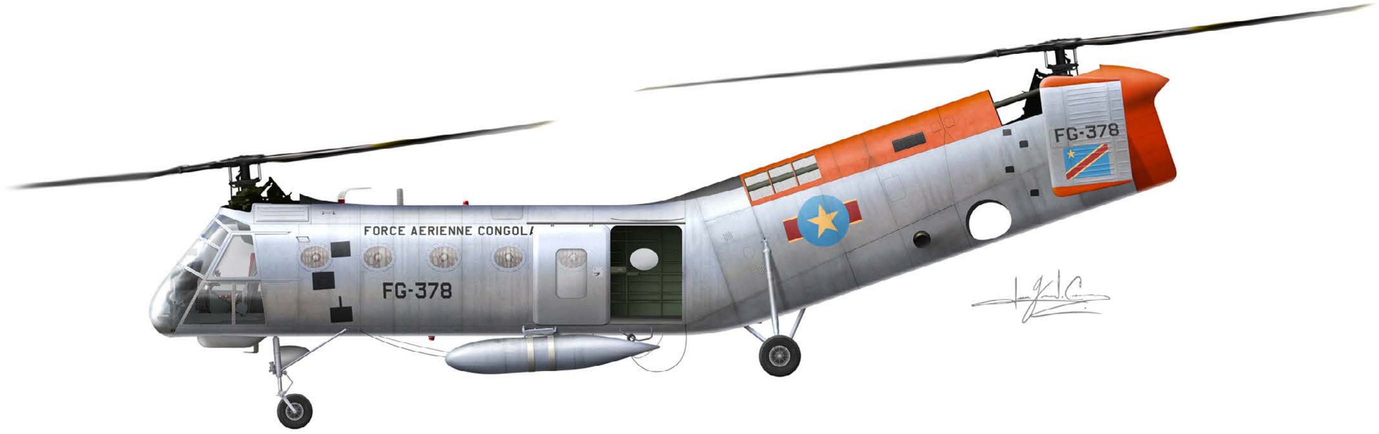
In June 1964, Douglas C-124 Globemaster transports of the US Air Force unloaded six Vertol-Piasecki H-21 helicopters at N'Djili International. While still wearing their USAF insignia, the helicopters were assembled inside the famous, huge hangar on the eastern side of this giant facility. However, soon after, all of the markings were removed and the H-21s handed over to the FATAC. By the time this example – the former 52-8677 – wore only a simple black serial 677 on the fin. The helicopter is known to have been badly damaged and abandoned during the rescue operation for the CIA's operative Dick Holm in Bitma on 26 February 1965. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



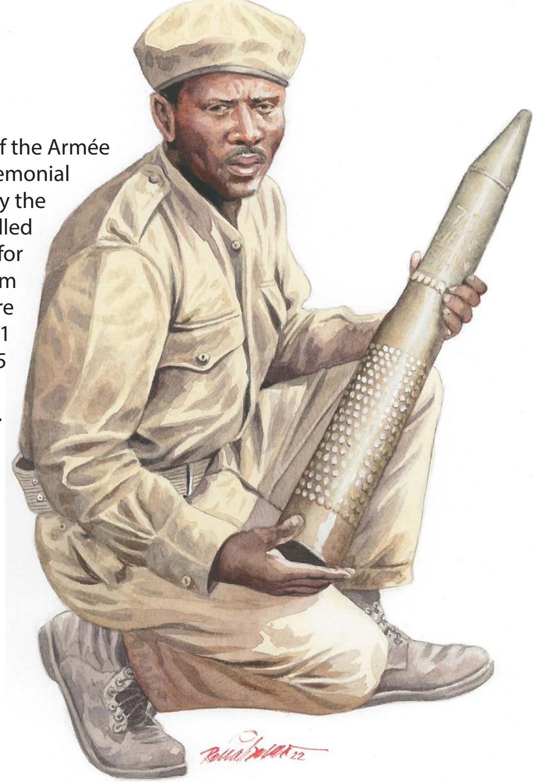
This H-21, formerly 53-4322, was part of the first batch of H-21s delivered to the FATAC in June 1964 as revolts in the Congo increased in intensity. The Belgian crews of the H-21s were trained to fly them by airmen of the USAF. The H-21 experienced a relatively short career in the Congo. It was damaged during operations in the Wamba area on 10 February 1965 (shortly after receiving national markings on both sides of the fuselage and fin flashes), when its rotors hit trees. Subsequently, it was cannibalised for spare parts and later destroyed. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



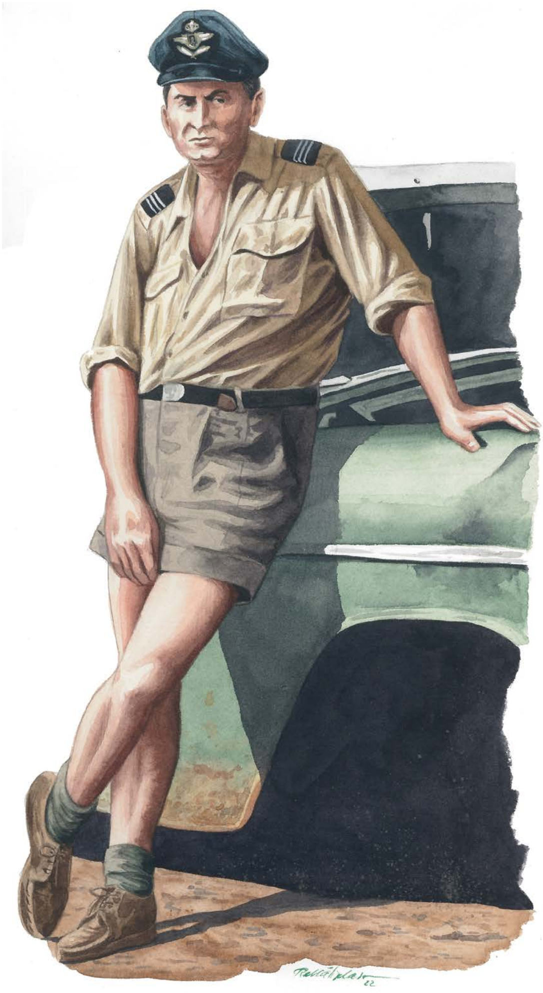
Another of ex-USAF H-21s donated to the FATAC was the former 52-8697 which received not only the FAC serial number FG-697 but the full national insignia on the fuselage and the fin. It also had the full service title applied along the forward upper fuselage. This helicopter's luck ran out mid-1965 when it was seriously damaged during operations in the Bunia area and had to be abandoned. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



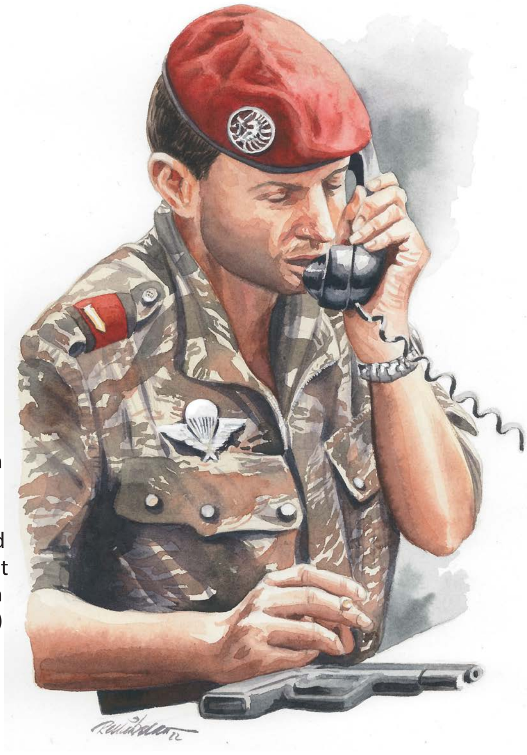
Another of H-21s (the ex 53-4378) to reach the Congo in July 1964, received the FAC serial FG-378. Like few others, it had large parts of its upper and rear fuselage painted in dayglo orange and unlike other H-21s, it received the full national and service insignia. This helicopter served until 27 June 1965 when contact with its crew was lost during operations between Stanleyville and Buta. Eventually, the wreckage was located on 3 December 2010, however, no trace of the crew was ever found. (Artwork by Luca Canossa)



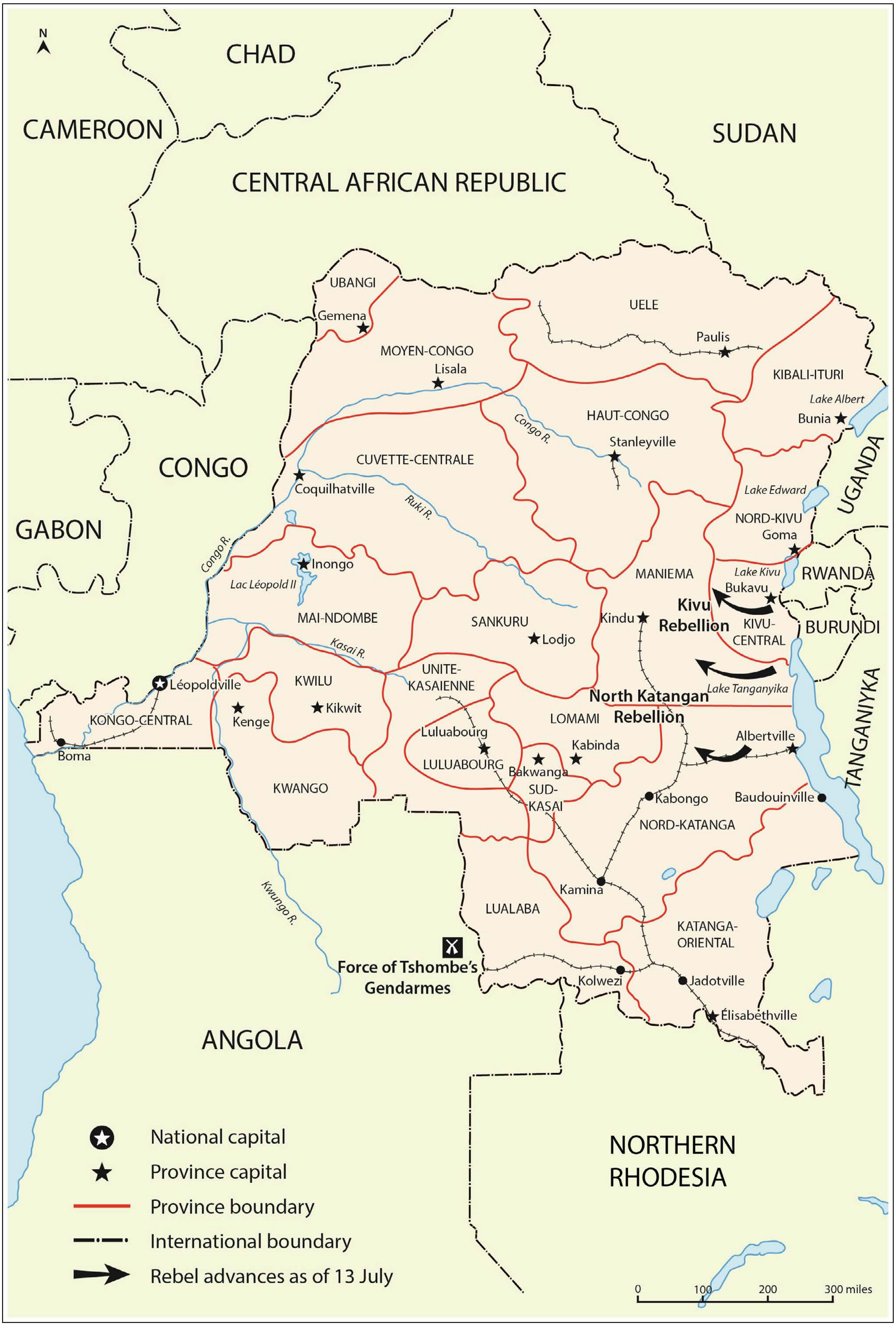
Though uniforms of officers and soldiers of the Armée Nationale Congolaise (ANC) performing ceremonial duties were often tailored to fit, those worn by the rank and file of the army were frequently dishevelled through the lack of care. It was not unusual for ANC troops to recover odd bits of uniform from comrades killed in action. Generally, they were supposed to be equipped with US-made M1 helmets and olive-green Force Publique M1955 teneu de combat uniforms, collarless jackets and webbing copied from the British 1937 pattern. However, these were rather rare pieces of gear, just like their rubber-soled boots. (Artwork by Renato Dalmaso)



The uniforms worn by Belgian airmen of the FATAC matched their rank and uniforms worn by officers of other Western air forces. Due to the heat and humidity of the Congo, only light blouses were worn – even if still with epaulettes displaying the rank (Captain in this case) – and usually combined with shorts. (Artwork by Renato Dalmaso)



This French parachute officer is shown wearing the contemporary French paratrooper's maroon beret with insignia of his branch and the paratrooper's camouflage uniform with his 'paratrooper wings' on the chest. The French paras became involved in support of Moise Tschombe and were deployed to oppose Mobutu during the Mercenary Revolt of 1967. For that operation, they were only issued with French made weapons. (Artwork by Renato Dalmaso)


N
CHAD
CAMEROON
SUDAN
CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
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Paulis
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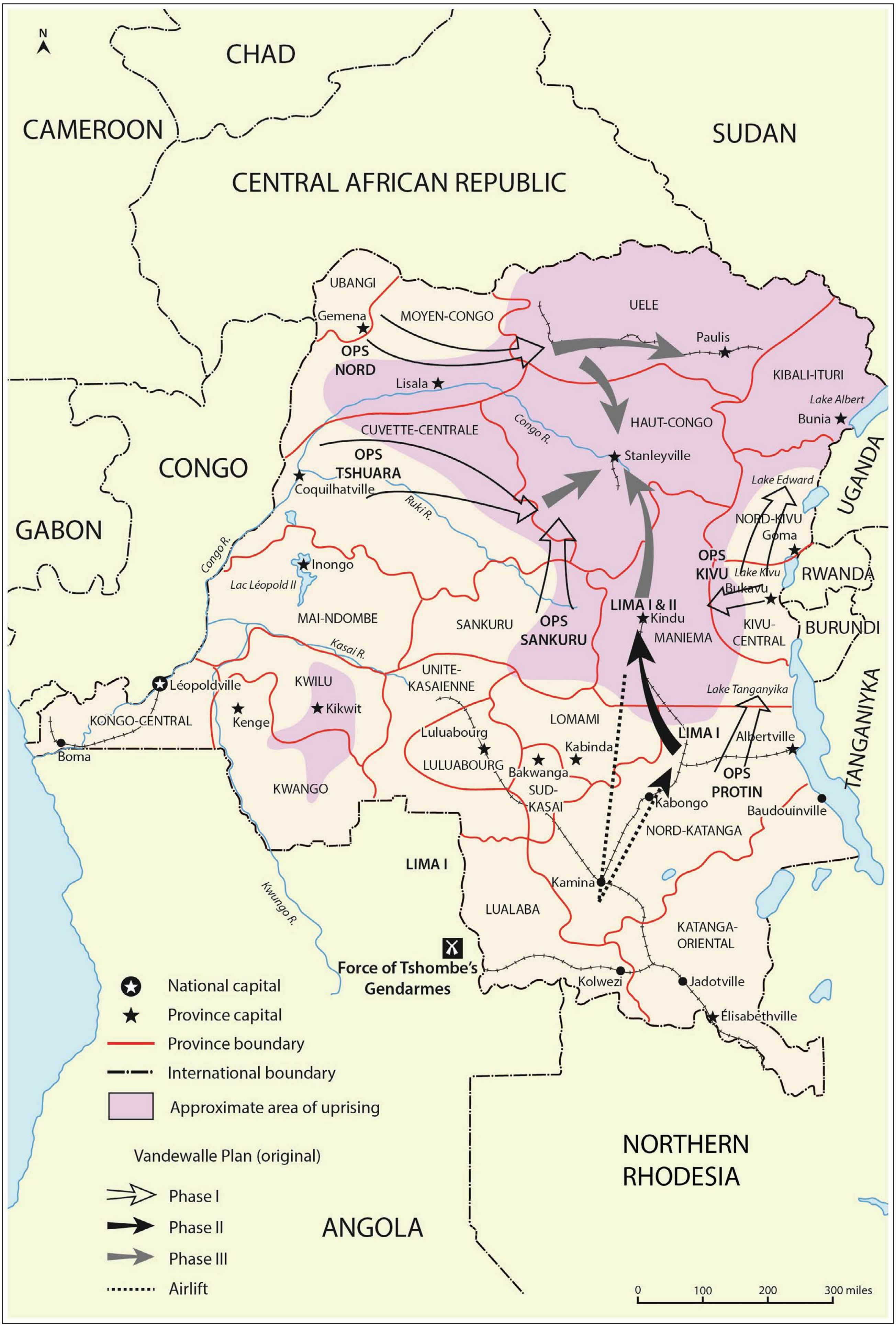
Lisala
KIBALI-ITURI
Lake Albert
Bunia
HAUT-CONGO
Congo R.
Stanleyville
CONGO
CUVETTE-CENTRALE
Coquilhatville
Ruki R.
UGANDA
Lake Edward
NORD-KIVU
Goma
GABON
Congo R.
Inongo
Lac Léopold II
MANIEMA
Lake Kivu
Bukavu
RWANDA
Kivu
Rebellion
MAI-NDOMBE
SANKURU
Lodjo
Kindu
KIVU-
CENTRAL
BURUNDI
Kasai R.
UNITE-
KASAIENNE
Léopoldville
KWILU
Kikwit
North Katangan
Rebellion
Lake Tanganyika
TANGANIYKA
KONGO-CENTRAL
Kenge
LOMAMI
Luluabourg
Albertville
Boma
LULUABOURG
Kabinda
Bakwanga
SUD-
KASAI
KWANGO
Kabongo
Baudouinville
NORD-KATANGA
Kwungo R.
Kamina
LUALABA
KATANGA-
ORIENTAL
Force of Tshombe's
Gendarmes
Kolwezi
Jadotville
Élisabethville
ANGOLA
National capital
Province capital
Province boundary
International boundary
Rebel advances as of 13 July
NORTHERN
RHODESIA
0
100
200
300 miles

The revolts of 1964 reached their peak in July that year and this affected the eastern parts of the Congo. (Map by George Anderson)


N
CHAD
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RWANDA
BURUNDI
TANGANYIKA
NORTHERN RHODESIA
ANGOLA
UBANGI
Gemena
MOYEN-CONGO
OPS NORD
Lisala
UELE
Paulis
KIBALI-ITURI
Lake Albert
Bunia
HAUT-CONGO
Congo R.
Stanleyville
CUVETTE-CENTRALE
OPS TSHUARA
Coquilhatville
Ruki R.
Lake Edward
NORD-KIVU
Goma
OPS KIVU
Lake Kivu
Bukavu
Congo R.
Inongo
Lac Léopold II
MAI-NDOMBE
SANKURU
OPS SANKURU
LIMA I & II
Kindu
MANIEMA
KIVU-CENTRAL
Kasai R.
Léopoldville
KWILU
UNITE-KASAIENNE
Lake Tanganyika
KONGO-CENTRAL
Kenge
Kikwit
LOMAMI
LIMA I
Albertville
Boma
Luluabourg
Kabinda
LULUABOURG
Bakwanga
SUD-KASAI
OPS PROTIN
KWANGO
Kabongo
Baudouinville
NORD-KATANGA
LIMA I
Kwungo R.
Kamina
LUALABA
KATANGA-ORIENTAL
Force of Tshombe's Gendarmes
Kolwezi
Jadotville
Élisabethville
National capital
Province capital
Province boundary
International boundary
Approximate area of uprising
Vandewalle Plan (original)
Phase I
Phase II
Phase III
Airlift
0
100
200
300 miles

This map shows the extent of the joint operations of different mercenary units, the ANC, and the FATAC which ran from August 1964 with the aim of eliminating rebels in the eastern and north-eastern Congo. The most obvious target was Stanleyville where rebels led by Nicolas Olenga, held over 1,000 Europeans, Americans and other foreign nationals captive. (Map by George Anderson)

FG-697 pictured on the outskirts of the village to which the stricken Dick Holm had been taken following the crash of a Cuban-piloted T-28. (Author's collection)

Dick Holm was transported from Leopoldville to Texas on a Boeing 707 sent by US Defence Secretary Robert McNamara. Here, he is seen at Paulis following his rescue in February 1964. (Author's collection)

By 28 March 1965, Hoare's column had reached Faradje, a town found a short distance from the border with Sudan. Most of the rebels fled as the mercenaries approached and after Faradje's capture, a detachment of 5th Commando was ordered to guard the town while the bulk of the unit advanced towards Watsa. During the initial assault on Faradje, 5th Commando took hundreds of prisoners but it was soon realised that the Africans they had captured were not rebels at all. It turned out that they were members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/SPLA) who wanted to join the ANC. They also wanted to buy as many weapons and as much ammunition as possible to start their own rebellion in the south of the Sudan.

As for the Congolese who were taken prisoner at Faradje, they were put to work by the mercenaries who made them prepare a landing strip for the C-47s. The first (9T-PKE) arrived at Faradje on 31 March but was unfortunate enough to fall victim to the many holes along the runway. Its landing gear damaged, it was only fit for the scrap heap. However, over the coming months, the landing strip became a regular destination for FATAC crews.

One navigator, Freddy Huggenberger, flew 25 missions between March 31 and July 12 to this remote part of the Congo. What follows are accounts of FATAC crews who served in the area.

Emile Janssens (flight engineer):

> We flew from BAKA to Stanleyville on 13 March where a maintenance team replaced the propeller on 9T-PKE. Following its repair, we flew from Stanleyville to Fardje via Bunia on 31 March with a cargo that included 1,500 grenades intended for mercenaries of 14 Commando, a unit comprising former Katangese gendarmes known as the 'Diablos' and commanded by Belgian Christian Tavernier. The 9T-PKE was the first C-47 to land at Faradje and we had been told that the runway was long and narrow.
>
> There was no radio link with the men on the ground and we did not know the wind direction. It meant that as we approached the landing strip, our pilot Gustaaf Vandaele, had to make numerous corrections to be able to land. We did not know that the landing strip had been repaired by the prisoners or that holes along the runway had been insufficiently filled with gravel and earth. On landing, one wheel of the landing gear went into one of the holes which caused the aircraft to bounce and turn to the left. 'Staf' struggled to keep control of the C-47 and one of its propellors hit the ground. One of the wings also suffering damage.
>
> I looked out of the window and saw plumes of smoke coming out of the cowl covering the starboard engine. The engine was turned off, we jumped out of the plane as quickly as possible before our cargo of grenades exploded but as we opened the door of the aircraft we were confronted by gun-toting mercenaries. We had to explain that we were bringing them ammunition but were told that we were blocking the runaway and that a reconnaissance aircraft was due the next day. We removed our aircraft from the runaway at gun point.
>
> That evening, we reported that the propellor was broken and that it could not be repaired. The message was picked up in flight by a WIGMO pilot who then relayed it to Stanleyville and

Mechanic Edmond De Rauw stands by Simba prisoners captured at Faradje in March 1965. Curious Congolese from the town look on. (Author's collection)

Though the prisoners pictured here were rebels, many Africans held by mercenaries at Faradje were Sudanese who had crossed the border into the Congo to purchase weapons for their own rebellion. (Author's collection) from Stanleyville the message was sent to BAKA. At first, they understood that we had lost the propellor in mid-air. Needless to say, this caused a good deal of panic back at the base.

The next day, Major Alain Blume arrived at Faradje to inspect the damage. He noted the aircraft could not be repaired on the spot and gave the order to dismantle as many vital parts of the aircraft as possible and to load them on to 9T-PKJ piloted by Luc Mommer. We returned to Stanleyville while 9T-PKE ended its days beside the runway at Faradje. We were not asked to provide an explanation and we took the first flight aboard a C-130 on 2 April 1965 to Leopoldville to collect another C-47. It was not until 7 April that we picked up 9T-PKI to fly it back to BAKA, so we had four days by the pool and a well-needed rest.

Operations Around Watsa, Aba and Aru

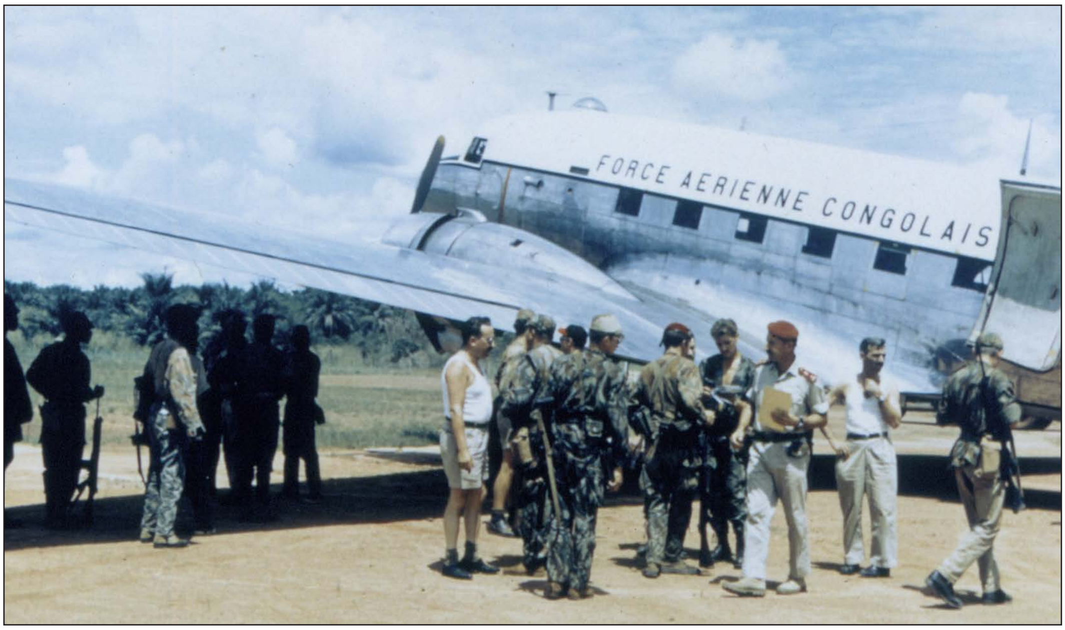
Alex Everaerts (pilot):

From 16 March to 10 May, I was stationed at Bunia and flew 9T-PKB. My navigator being François Schellekens, Willy Torreele was the radio operator and Edmond De Rauw, the flight engineer. Bob Buyse was the operations officer in Bunia and had about 10 technicians at his disposal. From 30 March, Alain Blume was added to my crew and during my time at Bunia, we flew 236 hours mostly refuelling and taking part in airborne missions.

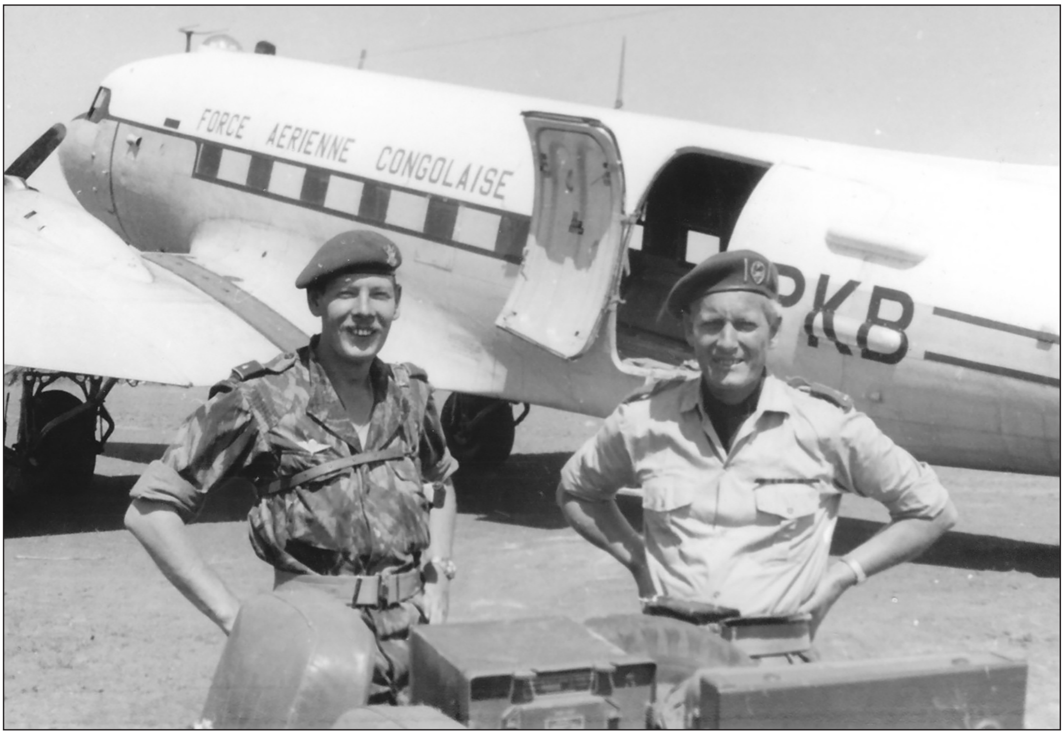
One of the missions in which we participated, took place on 30 March 1965. We landed at Watsa with a load of ammunition, fuel and food and here, we met up with Mike Hoare who was due to hand over two Italians, a missionary and a Belgian mining engineer rescued from the Simba. The four were being kept almost as hostages by Hoare who wanted the Belgian engineer to provide him with information on the location of valuable minerals, especially gold. According to Hoare, this was the only means of paying the mercenaries. “Mercenaries get paid by plundering”, he said. It was only the next day when Lechat and Blume arrived on FG-697 that we convinced the mercenary leader to let the four people go.

Taking off from Watsa was not easy as the runway was only suitable for small twin-engine planes. The exact length of the runway was measured with the help of the mining engineer at barely 600 metres and after consulting the technical data sheet of the aircraft, the “Dash One” (our plane), was pushed to the very beginning of the runway by force of arms. During the manoeuvre, the tail wheel was cut by a piece of bamboo, so FG-697 helicopter flew the four people and Hoare to Bunia and returned with a new one. In the meantime, we had lightened our C-47 considerably by draining fuel and keeping only what was needed to reach Bunia.

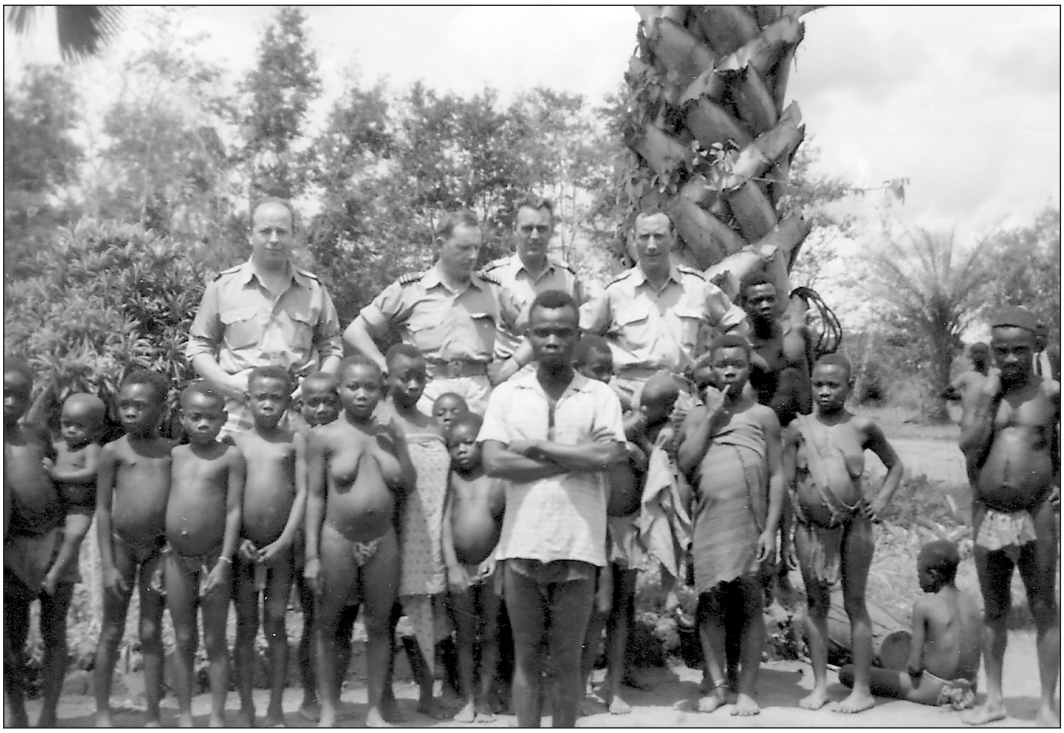
As we spent the night in an abandoned villa, we could hear the mortar fire of the mercenaries posted at the airfield. In the cool of the morning of April 1, we took off for a one-hour flight to Bunia with Lieutenant Neyt of the 5th Mechanised Brigade as my only



The FATAC was called upon to take groups of mercenaries into the field during operations in March 1965. Here, French mercenaries led by Bob Denard (holding document) await transfer. (Author’s collection)



Lieutenant Michel Neyt is pictured alongside Alistair Wicks, the 2IC of 5th Commando at Watsa on 2 April 1965. Neyt served as a paracommando with the 5th Brigade from December 1964 to the end of April 1965. He returned to the Congo from December 1965 to December 1966. (Michel Neyt collection)



The crews of the FATAC often encountered members of the Pygmy tribe. To ensure their loyalty, cigarettes and salt were sometimes distributed as the FATAC's aircraft flew over Pygmy villages. Pictured here are FATAC members Hubert Van Bever, Léon Clesse, Franz Gilson and Jean Van Roy. (Author's collection)

> passenger. I was quite sure that we were the first and the last to fly a C-47 over Watsa.

Edgard Brokken (pilot), describes a mission to Sudan for the CIA:

> There were various CIA missions to Sudan to supply or relieve Sudanese rebels who were fighting the Simbas. On 12 April 1965 we took off on FG-673 but it was so overloaded that we needed the entire length of the Paulis runway. We didn't know exactly where we were going but we knew we had to land a few miles to the left of Aba. On the spot, we received a black envelope with our new destination inside. We took off at 04:00 in the cool of the morning and I had to maintain a speed of 2,800 rpm because the overloading would have brought down the H-21. We dropped off the CIA men armed with Chinese and Soviet weapons "in the middle of nowhere" in Sudan and made our way back to Faradje where we were refuelled and made ready for a flight to Paulis. Two weeks later, we were sent back to the Sudan to pick up the CIA unit. All their missions were carried out from Paulis but it was useless asking them what they had been doing in the Sudan. All I know is that they travelled around in a jeep fitted with a single-band radio that they used to keep contact with Washington.

Freddy Huggenberger (navigator):

> An H-21 commanded by Edgard Brokken flew several missions along the Sudanese border. Its role was to transport Sudanese volunteers for the ANC from Aba to Faradje from where they boarded our C-47 and were taken to Stanleyville. I also remember that there were Pygmies living in the area around Faradje and our planes were sometimes used to drop cigarettes and salt to them. This was a psychological manoeuvre to keep the Pygmies on our side.

SPRING 1965

More Mercenary Loot

At the end of February 1965, a new unit comprising French mercenaries was created. Commanded by Robert 'Bob' Denard, the first mission of this 1 Battalion 'Choc' was not an enormous success. Leaving Paulis on 7 April 1965 to clear an area between Paulis and Wamba, the unit was ambushed leaving two mercenaries dead and Denard with a broken leg. The unit was evacuated by H-21 and they were taken back to Paulis.

Freddy Huggenberger:

> One day we had to go to Paulis to evacuate wounded mercenaries from Bob Denard's group. They had been transported in H-21 by Brokken from Faradje to Paulis and among them was a mercenary who had a trunk containing his loot that he wanted to sell in exchange for dollars. He was a Belgian who had committed a hold-up in Menin and he was proud of the fact that Belgian newspaper *Laatste Nieuws* had reported the incident.

The Last of the H-21s

The small, strategically located town of Buta captured by the ANC in November 1964 had been retaken by the Simba on 5 December. To rid the town, once and for all of their presence, Operation Imperial Violets was launched on 26 May 1965. Four different units forming four different columns were used in the advance on Buta. They comprised 5 Commando (advancing from Niangara), 1 Battalion Choc (advancing from Paulis), 8 Commando (advancing from Stanleyville and 12 Commando (advancing from Bumba).

As during previous mercenary operations, the FATAC was called upon regularly to ferry supplies of a different nature and to lift injured troops to field hospitals for treatment. Doing so brought many risks, especially when flying over rebel-held territory. Eventually, the number of missions the 'flying bananas' were sent on was to take a toll as climatic conditions, technical issues and rebel weapons put an end to their participation in the Congo Crisis. One example of the dangers faced by the FATAC was a mission to pick up wounded from Aketi on 30 May 1965. The FG-673 was shot at by rebels during take-off forcing the aircraft back to the ground. Its crew (Robert Jacobs, Henri Vandegaer and Roger Lowagie) escaped unharmed but their H-21 was irreparably damaged. Abandoned where it fell, FG-673 was one of only two H-21s still in service with the FATAC.

A week earlier on April 25, the fourth of six FATAC helicopters (FG-697) was lost in Bunia. This happened after the replacement of an engine and when its crew (Edouard Boutet, Jean-Marie Coyette and Roger Piret) encountered problems when attempting take-off. The aircraft lost power during the lifting stage and fell back heavily to the ground. Once again, there was too much damage to envisage

FG-673 and its crew pictured at Bunia. It was abandoned in May 1965 after being shot at by rebel forces and crash landing. (Author's collection)

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOL
FG-697

FG-697 in slightly happier times. (Author's collection)

FG-697 was abandoned after crash landing in Bunia in April 1965. (Author's collection)

the recuperation of the aircraft. The loss of these two H-21s left only FG-378. However, the helicopter and its crew were reported missing less than four weeks later. The wreckage was not located until 2010.

After the liberation of hostages of the Simba in Buta on 26 June, the crew of FG-378 waited in Stanleyville for the order to fly to the town to pick them up and transport them to safety. The next day, its crew (Frans Allaeys, Robert Jacobs and Raymond Bordon) put the H-21 in motion but were forced to turn return to base due to extremely dangerous weather. A call was made to the control tower at Simi-Simi giving an estimated time of arrival (ETA) of some 30 minutes; however, this was the last time the crew were ever heard from. A search operation was launched using all available means. Three FATAC C-47s, two B-26s, T-28s, a Bell 47 and a C-46 from 22 Squadron scoured the countryside for three weeks for any sign of the missing helicopter but no trace of it was found until 40 years later.

The accident involving FG-373 marked the end of the FATAC's use of the H-21. Though not particularly suited to the conditions in which they were to operate in the Congo, in the past the H-21 had played an invaluable role both for ground troops and for civilians caught up in the crisis. Indeed, many soldiers, missionaries, priests, nuns and ordinary Congolese owed their lives to men who flew these helicopters despite the latter possessing relatively little experience with this type of machine. The lost H-21s were never replaced and the FAC flying Bell-47s took over most of the duties previously performed by the FATAC's helicopters. Alain Blume and Jean-Marie Jacquemart provide more detail.

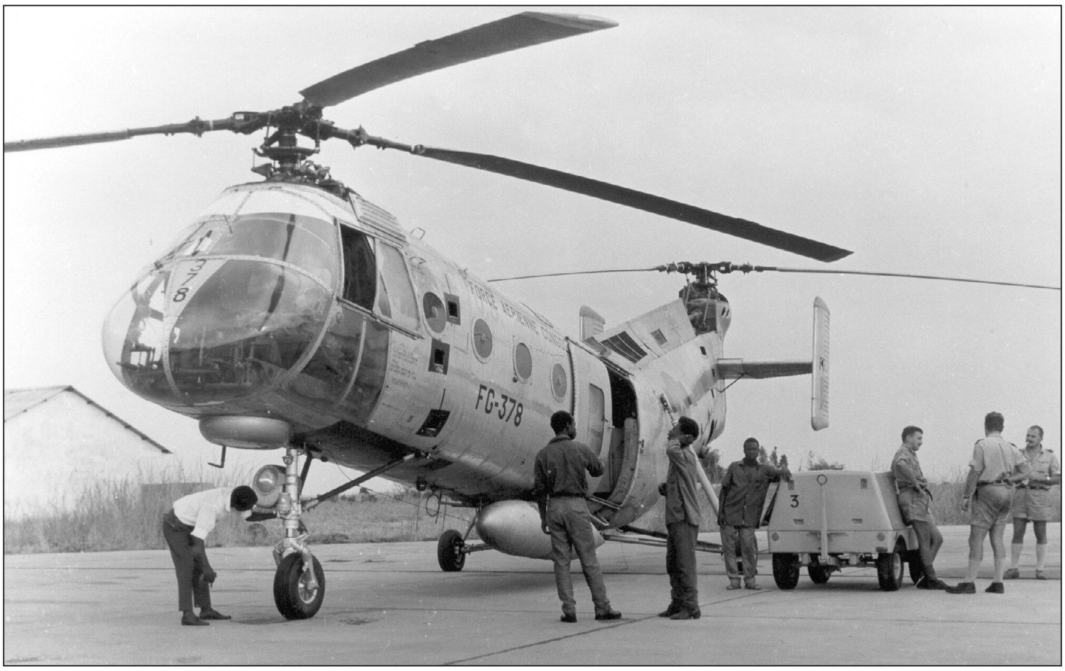
Alain Blume:

> On 27 June 1965, FG-673 announced to the tower at Stanleyville that it would be landing within 30 minutes. Giving no further sign of life, the detachment commander ordered a search operation and 9T-PKF and 9T-PKH set out to locate the helicopter. There was nothing in the dense canopy of the Congolese forests to indicate that a helicopter had passed through the trees, so we had to conclude that it had been swallowed up without a visible trace. If the helicopter had crashed into the sea, there would be signs of oil or even debris. Here, there was nothing.

> Jacquemart:

> The search for FG-378 was launched immediately by Colonel Vandepoel and ended around 12 July. C-47s, T-28s, B-26s and a Bell 47 participated in the mission but without success. With little to no hope of finding the crew alive, the men aboard the

helicopter were presumed to be dead and legal aspects linked to their service were initiated on 8 October 1965. Mobutu recognised that the deaths had caused suffering to the families of the crew and now as president of the Congo, he decided that the men would continue to receive their salaries.



FG-378 and its crew were reported missing in June 1965. Though the wreckage was located in 2010, the bodies of the crew were never located. (Author's collection)

Ops South, Operation Banzi and Mobutu as Head of State

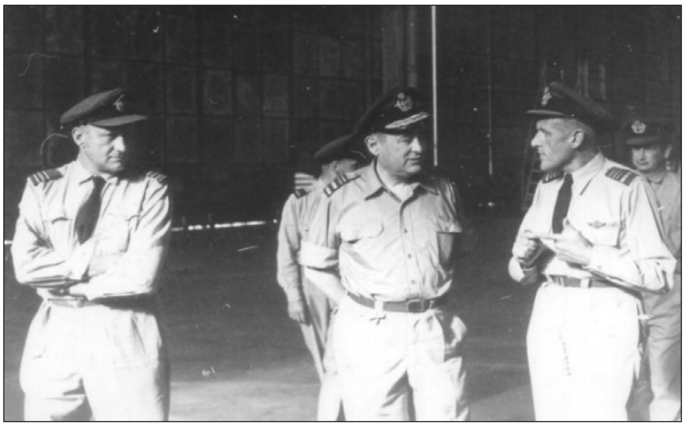
By mid-1965, their rebellion was far from over although the Simba were little by little, being forced out of the northern regions of the Congo. Rebels loyal to Laurent-Désiré Kabila began to receive increasing quantities of mainly Chinese weapons and ammunition provided by radical African nations such as Algeria. As for reinforcements in human terms, Cuba trained and sent approximately 150 men to train and to fight alongside locally recruited Congolese. The Congolese forced or coerced into joining a movement was on the wane.

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was amongst the Cubans who began to arrive in March 1965. The rebels still controlled large parts of the Ruzizi Valley and areas around Lake Tanganyika. It was from across the lake in Tanzania that the rebels received tons of weapons needed to continue the rebellion. Receiving extra support from Ugandan separatists, the Simba conducted regular attacks on the ANC forcing it to assume a mainly defensive stance. Mercenary forces launched new operations known as Ops Sud (Southern Operations) and Operation Banzi, to reclaim the occupied zones for the government.

From the spring of 1965, the CIA assembled makeshift naval forces comprising locally acquired vessels in addition to the ground troops of 5 Commando and its usual air support provided by the Congolese Air Force (CAF). After August 1965, they were joined by two swift boats formerly operating in the Caribbean which used to launch attacks against mainland Cuba. What is more, the Cuban exile crews of these boats were also recruited. Their job was to put an end to the weapons shipments and prepare landing areas for 5 Commando. The Cuban exiles knew Guevara was in the Congo and hoped to wreak revenge for the Bay of Pigs invasion and its aftermath. Indeed, several members of the crews had been imprisoned after the failure of the invasion.

All these forces combined to present a formidable opposition to the Simba. Operations Sud and Banzi were coordinated by Major R. Hardenne, a regular officer in the Belgian Army and an advisor to Mobutu. Though the operations proved costly for pro-government forces in terms of lives, when they ended in December 1966, they were considered a success. Rebel activity in eastern Congo had been stamped out, thousands of Simba lay dead and the Cuban forces, including Guevera, had been forced out. Naturally, as part of the Belgian Technical Mission, the men of the FATAC and their C-47s were to take part in operations. This participation consisted mainly of transporting ANC commandos into the disputed areas.

BAKA received important visitors on the first anniversary of its deployment to the Congo. Pictured here in June 1965 are from left to right: P. Coucke, Roger Jacquemart and Lieutenant General Jan Ceuppens, Chief of Staff of the Belgian Air Force and the representative of Belgian Defence Minister P.W. Segers. (Author's collection)



Freddy Aerts and FATAC commander Jean-François Vandepoel provide information to Ceuppens on the nature of operations. (Author's collection)

By October 1965, the Congo had gained a semblance of order and the rebels were confined to the east of the country. In November, political ambition once again laid the foundations for internal disputes that would turn to armed conflict in 1967. The source of

Pictured at BAKA, the duties of 9T-PKJ varied from transporting injured mercenaries to Stanleyville, picking up supplies from Bunia and Bukavu, while also serving as transport for stocks of beer. (Author's collection)

this conflict being the dismissal of Prime Minister Moïse Tshombe on 18 October 1965.

Another reason for conflict was Mobutu seizing the opportunity to mount a second coup d'Etat and installing himself as president of the Congo. Setting up a military regime, the former *Force Publique* sergeant Colonel Léonard Mulamba was appointed prime minister. Another former *Force Publique* sergeant, General Louis Bobozo, was appointed as Chief of Staff of the ANC. Mobutu himself had spent seven years in the *Force Publique*. At the beginning of Mobutu's reign, nothing changed for the FATAC. The unit still formed part of the ANC and its missions continued as normal.

The return of Jan Baras to FATAC:

> After a three-day trip aboard a DC-6, I arrived at BAKA on 11 November accompanied by three other members of a C-47 crew. We were allocated 9T-PKJ two days later and we were put on stand-by almost immediately. The aircraft piloted by Captain Bernard Maes, a Fairchild C-119 pilot with little experience of the C-47, the remainder of the crew was warrant officer Fleurinck as flight engineer and warrant officer Hector Daeninckx.
>
> The first mission delayed by a day due to testing the aircraft, on 14 November 1965 9T-PKJ headed for Stanleyville. From here, it was then assigned to perform refuelling duties in north-eastern Congo and to ANC and mercenary posts at Ingi, Faradje, Dungu, Paulis Buta and Bunia.
>
> One day in Ingi, we were talking to the local mercenary leader when one of his men came in a panic shouting, "Otto has a bullet in his chest! What's happened?" Otto, who was armed, had rushed like everyone else to the airfield when our plane approached. His belt to which his revolver was attached was open and as soon as he arrived at the airfield, he tried to close it as he was getting out of the vehicle; the revolver – safety not on – was still in his hand. As he hung on to the door of the vehicle, a shot went off and hit Otto in the chest.
>
> As usual, there were no medical personnel where we landed. The only thing we could do was to stop the bleeding and get back to Stanleyville as soon as possible where there was a doctor. Daeninckx contacted the Stanleyville control tower to request ambulance and medical personnel to meet us upon our arrival but when we landed two hours later it was too late. Otto had succumbed to his wounds leaving Daeninckx to remark, "Your life counts for nothing. You are a number".
>
> In Stanleyville itself, life was very bearable at the time. We stayed at the Congo Palace Hotel where we had our own bar and mess hall and in the evenings when the hotel became too boring, we would go to the Olympia Bar for a drink. Run by a Greek, he hired a band several times a week and it meant that we could enjoy typical Congolese music. We took care of the supplies for our mess and for the mercenaries and made frequent trips to Bunia for meat and to Bukavu for fruit and vegetables. We bought Stanor d'Abord beer plus strong liquors that had arrived from Belgium via BAKA and one of the crew even found the time to run a small business. He had brought a stock of watches from Belgium that he sold to the mercenaries and the Congolese and a ladies' watch featuring the effigy of the Mona Lisa that could also be used as a pendant was extremely popular with the mercenary "housewives".
>
> Another occasion I remember well were the festivities in Stanleyville on 24 November, organised to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the city's liberation from the Simba. There was a colourful procession of ANC soldiers, civilians and school children and the FATAC participated by flying three C-47s overhead.

6

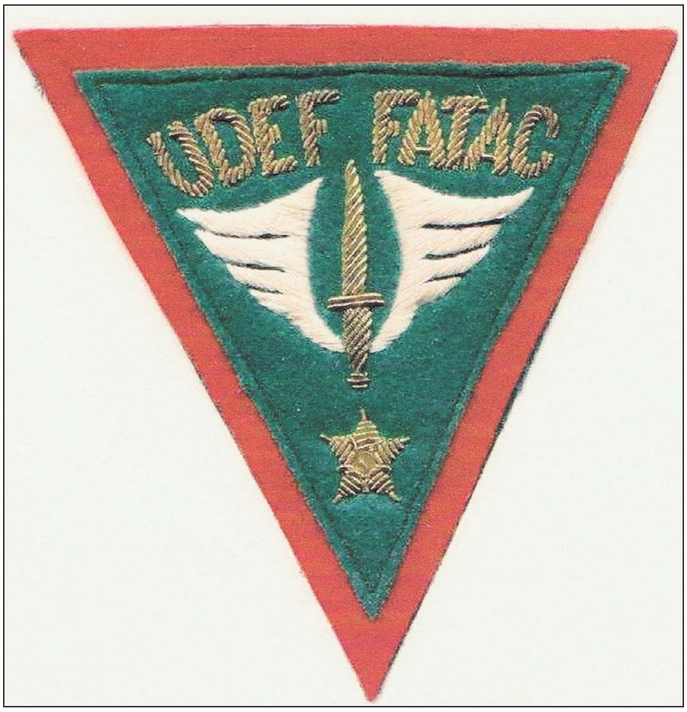
The Defence Units of the FATAC

As its acronym suggests, the FATAC was primarily an air unit tasked with carrying out tactical support to the ground forces of the ANC. However, as with most air forces around the world, the bases used by these air forces are protected by specially trained groups of soldiers known as Airfield Defence Units. As for the FATAC, it was no different in that sub-units were created within the FATAC – the French name of these units was the UDéf, a term short for *Unités de Défence*.

In addition to protecting airfields, the UDéf took part in most of the operations described in Chapter 5 including those at Stanleyville and its surrounding areas in November 1964. The members of this unit commanded by Captain Auguste Servais also arrived at BAKA in June 1964 and were recruited by Major Sokay. The unit had its own uniforms, its own insignia and as with some of the pilots recruited for the FATAC's air operations, some of the UDéf had previously served in the Congo when the country was still under Belgian rule. Like the previous chapters of this volume, Chapter 6 contains testimonies of the men that were recruited. Here, Marc Carlier gives his account:

Marc Carlier (centre wearing lighter coloured shirt) with Belgian and Congolese members of the UDéf. (Author's collection)

> The day before departure, the 50 or so volunteers of which I was a part, received a briefing at the section of the Belgian Air Force headquarters that dealt with operations in the Congo (VS1). Here we completed the administrative formalities and were given our uniforms and on top of this we were awarded an advance of 20,000 Belgian francs and all the NCOs were given the rank of warrant officer. What this meeting did not do, nonetheless, was reply to the important questions a young NCO such as me, was asking himself. I was a trained paracommando, a physical education instructor and I flew a glider. Why, then, was I leaving my parents' farm to go on a mission in the Congo; what were we going to do there; and what weapons were we going to use? Nothing was said about this. The questions remaining unanswered, I wanted to withdraw my application. However, a friend talked me out of it at the last moment and my departure from Melsbroek was planned for 19 September 1964.
>
> The day after our arrival, we set out to discover the base. We visited the control tower, the maintenance hangar, the former flight school now occupied by mercenaries, the infirmary, the completely dilapidated swimming pool which served as a washhouse and, finally, the chapel built in the purest colonial style. At the entrance to the mess hall, we were given chloroquine pills to protect us against malaria.
>
> Servais knew the base well and set us up in a large colonial villa 200 metres from the mess. Over the past four years it had suffered from lack of maintenance and as well as the roof having holes in it, the doors and windows had been taken away and the washing facilities were filthy and not working. We moved in nevertheless, as the conditions were better than those in the barracks. For the next two weeks, we cleaned and furnished the villa with furniture we found lying around. We got used to the conditions quickly but the weekends seemed long. We couldn't use the swimming pool, so Claude Leemans and I went shooting in a nearby forest.



The UDéf badge was triangular and worn on the left sleeve. It comprises gold dagger with silver wings and a five-pointed star, all embroidered on a green background with a scarlet border. The acronym is UDéf *FATAC*. The scarlet and green colours are those of Katanga. Initially, the Katangan copper cross was intended to replace the Congo star because the Congolese officers and soldiers were former Katangan gendarmes. The crisscross was not chosen so as not to offend the Congolese. The beret insignia was gold for officers, silver for NCOs and bronze for corporals and soldiers. (Author's collection)

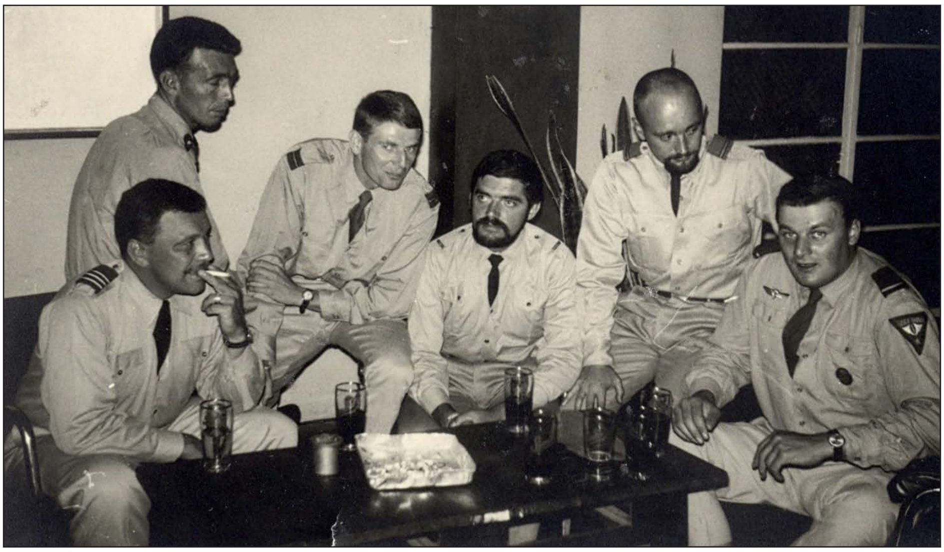
On 21 September 1964, Captain Auguste Servais and his group of NCO instructors, Marc Carlier, Christian Hornaert, Charles Destroyer, Claude Leemans, Maurice Bailleux, Pierre Tourré, Gilbert Mottard, Jean Pigeon, Roger Scarsé and Charles Werdefroy, arrived at BAKA via Tripoli and Leopoldville on board a DC-6 of the Belgian Air Force. They were welcomed by Lieutenant Colonel André Decock and the Belgian soldiers already at the base. Each platoon comprised two sections and the total strength of the UDéf was 150 men plus their commanding officers.

From February 1965, two other squadrons were formed to constitute a three-squadron battalion. Training and education took place in Kamina under the direction of Marc Carlier. The Congolese recruited to serve in the unit hailed mainly from the Kasongo area and were recruited with the assistance of Emmanuel Kasongo Niembo, a trained nurse, the tribal chief of the Katanga Baluba and a close friend of Moïse Tshombe. Highly respected by other tribal chiefs, Niembo's influence was paramount when it came to recruitment. Thanks to Niembo, the 150 former Katangese gendarmes were recruited in no time. Many were grateful to receive the opportunity to return to the Congo having sought refuge in Angola at the end of Katanga's secession. The recruits were trained by Belgian Marc Carlier, and equipped with FN FAL rifles. As for the welfare of these Congolese recruits, an associate of Niembo named Georges Mwenze assisted adjutant R. Scarsé when it came to the soldiers' salaries and daily needs. This amounted to 2,000 Congolese francs per month plus family allowances payable where the soldiers were based (Kamina, Stanleyville, Paulis, or Kindu). The soldiers' families generally resided around Kamina where they were entitled to free hospital treatment and schooling.

The training programme for Congolese recruits was very demanding. Many recruits had to be retrained in matters relating to discipline, rules of engagement, marksmanship, drill, tactics, camouflage and regulations. Another important aspect was teaching the Congolese to forget certain tribal superstitions such as witchcraft – a power used to control the Simba and convince them they were invisible to enemy bullets. The ANC soldiers also believed this was true and would lay down their weapons and flee as the Simba approached. Another belief related to the digging of trenches – holes in the ground were for the dead.

After two weeks intensive training, the recruits had learnt how to behave as a disciplined soldier ready to defend BAKA and parade before the personnel of the FATAC. Those who completed the training wore the insignia of the UDéf and were given the unit's grey beret.

A fourth reserve platoon was made up of Congolese who failed to get through the initial two-week training period. They were entrusted to Marc Carlier and Claude


Members of the defence units pictured here enjoying some time off. The insignia of the unit can be seen clearly on the left arm of the airmen situated on the right. The 1 Squadron of the UDéf was made up of three platoons with another acting as a service platoon. The unit was staffed by Belgian soldiers assisted by a few Congolese NCOs and some UDéf members were recruited from the ANC or were former Katangese gendarmes. From left to right, Auguste Servais, Tenteniers, Marc Cartier, Alain Grégoire, Roland Dusquesne and Henri Bertrand. (Author's collection)

The platoon commanders of the UDéf. Squadron commander Auguste Servais (fourth from left) and assistants Roger Scarcé (first left) and Gilbert Mottard (third from right). Second from left, 1 Platoon commanders Charles Werdefroy, 2 Platoon commanders Christian Hornaert (third from left) and Jean Bailleux (furthest right) and 3 Platoon joint commander Pierre Tourré, (second from right). 3 Platoon was also jointly commanded by Marc Carlier and Congolese warden officer (WO), Jean-Nestor Malaba. The corps WO was Jean Pigeon. (Author's collection)

A Profile of Unit Commander, Captain Auguste Servais

Auguste Servais was born in Arlon, Belgium on 3 May 1929. He completed his military service in 1949 as a reserve officer candidate at 15 Wing in Melsbroek and on 1 March 1950 he was appointed second lieutenant in the reserves. He served with the Aerodrome Defence Unit of 15 Wing for three years and, in 1953, he assumed administrative duties with the unit. In July 1960, he was a member of the Belgian Metropolitan Forces in the Congo and was placed at the disposal of the Ministry of African Affairs from September to November 1961. During the Katangese secession, Servais worked alongside other Belgians in the Katanganese Gendarmerie. He was the commander of the UDéf from September 1964 to July 1965. Retiring from the Belgian army in July 1980, Servais served as a reserve officer until 1984.

Leemans whose mission was to bring them to the same operational level as the three other platoons. Once their training was finished, they were integrated into the UDéf after proving their stamina through a 25-kilometre trek to the village of Sungu.

A Baptism of Fire for the UDéf

In mid-October 1964, the UDéf was involved in one of the first significant operations. A hundred or so ANC deserters from the Kongolo region commandeered a train as they fled the advance of the Simba heading for Kamina, thus threatening the security of the FATAC base. The UDéf conjugated its forces with those of the 5th Mechanised Brigade to stop the train and arrest the deserters. This was done by placing a vehicle across the track at the entrance to Kamina-Ville then encircling the train using three platoons of UDéf soldiers. No shot needed to be fired and the deserters' weapons and ammunition were recovered. The captives were taken to BAKA and kept under guard in the building which housed the control tower. After being handed over to the ANC, their fate is unknown.

Around the same time, a second incident occurred after Vandepoel received a request from the Belgian consul in Luluabourg to organise the evacuation of Europeans from Lodja. The mission was led by operations officer José Schepers and operations commander Servais. Four men of the UDéf were dispatched aboard a FATAC C-47 piloted by Raymond Baccaert.

On 10 October 1964, we carried out a mission at Lodja, some 460km north of Luluabourg and some 600km northwest of Kamina. We were sent to rescue Europeans threatened by the Simba and they included nuns from the order of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart who were teaching at mission schools in the area. Two C-47s were used in the operation and while I piloted 9T-PKC, Emile Chatelain commanded 9T-PKI. We weren't sure of what we would find on our arrival as the day before, a Swedish Twin Otter had landed at the airport and some of its crew had been killed by rebels.

Since we had already been shot at several times during previous missions, I told Major Alain Blume that I was willing to carry out this mission but that I did not want it to be a suicide mission. I asked him to assign members of the UDéf to travel on each of the planes. Chatelain was less experienced on C-47s than me, so I asked him to circle the landing strip and look out for signs of rebel activity as I prepared to land.

Given the go-ahead, we landed and began the embarkation of the nuns who had gathered on the runway. Insisting that we also take their charges, we managed to board around 40 passengers before rebels began to approach the aircraft and start firing at us. The UDéf

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAISE

The crew of 9T-PKJ pictured in Bukavu in 1967. From left to right, Jan Van Gompel (radio operator), Max Girardin (pilot), Jean-Claude Cortens (onboard mechanic), Marcel Willems (onboard mechanic). All four wearing standard-issue uniforms to suit the heat and humidity of the Congo, it is interesting to note the wearing of desert boots and a sheathed dagger. As for 9T-PKJ, it started service as 43-48255 and was delivered to N'Djili in early 1965. Then serving with Air Congo, it was transferred to the FATAC when its duties included transporting members of the Udéf. It was requisitioned by mercenaries during the Mercenary Revolt of late-1967 and was to serve with the Zairian Air Force until 1973. (Author's collection)

The 9T-PKE participated in the rescue mission at Lodja in early October 1964. It is pictured here in more peaceful conditions. (Author's collection)

Many Simba were mere children. This wounded child soldier was tended to by medics of the 5th Mechanised Brigade. Despite their youth, young rebels had no hesitation in committing atrocities against Europeans. (Author's collection)

was able to repulse the attack and I was able to take off. It was a similar situation for 9T-PKI.

After this incident, we were given the order to return to Kamina and arrived safely despite making an emergency landing in near total darkness. Luckily, the vehicles at BAKA were used to light up the runway to guide us home.

The UDéf and the Ommegang

As Limas 1 and 2 of the Ommegang were about to begin their long trek northwards in the direction of Stanleyville, platoons 1, 2 and 3 of the UDéf set of for Kongolo on 31 October. A fourth platoon, plus military police were guarding Kamina from attack by rebel forces. After crossing the Lufubu River, two platoons were dispatched to Kindu on 6 November with the mission of protecting the airfield.

When they reached their destination, they immediately came under rebel fire emanating from the control tower. It was swiftly taken by the UDéf whose communications specialists proceeded to re-establish links with the outside world and who were able to broadcast the news that the airfield had been captured. This being the first time the UDéf had direct contact with rebels and the first time they had killed any, the next stage in the operations was to organise patrols to survey the surrounding areas.

That afternoon, one patrol led by Marc Carlier was sent to Kindu to find that the 5th Mechanised Brigade now had control of the town.

When I arrived at the control tower, I saw a dead rebel soldier for the first time. He was wearing an olive-green jacket and seemed well equipped and there was another rebel with a knee injury who was lying on the ground of a hangar used by the fire services. When my men saw him, they threw him into an empty tank, doused him with gasoline and set him on fire. Unable to do anything when faced with this terrible scene, I wondered if this what was war was all about. If I had any qualms about these events, they disappeared in the afternoon when I met a lady named Cordiez. She told me that young Simba rebels had beaten her husband and son to death and that she had to pay them not throw the bodies to crocodiles. We transported her to the airfield from where she was evacuated to Leopoldville. Within the space of a few hours, I had witnessed both sides in the conflict commit dreadful atrocities.

Kindu: The Hub of Operations

When it came to locating Europeans in areas, the district commissioner of the Kindu, a man called Lardinois, provided much of the information needed for rescue operations. On 11 November, he told of an old Belgian planter named Dillaert who needed to be evacuated and FG-697 was dispatched to carry out the mission. The H-21 crewed by Lucien Carpels, Paul Van Casteren, Gabriël Christiaen and Jean-Marie Coyette. Both Marc Carlier and Gilbert Mottard took part in a rescue that saw Dillaert saved *in extremis*. By way of proof that this type of mission was dangerous, a bullet was found to have gone between the seats of where the H-21's pilots had been sitting. Nevertheless, throughout November hundreds of Europeans were rescued in the area including over a hundred from the mining centre of Kalima.

By mid-November 1964, life in Kindu and the surrounding had just about returned to normal. The airfield at Kindu became the main hub for all 5th Brigade's military operations. A never-ending aerial ballet, starring both the aircraft of the Makasi and the FATAC, took place overhead as fighters, transport planes and helicopters, worked to ensure that Limas 1 and 2 remained supplied. Here, Vandewalle and his operations officer Captain A. Closset of the 5th Brigade were able to set up base in one of the buildings at the airfield. This remained the supply base for the Ommegang until 23 November. The operational HQ then moved to Punia in preparation for the attack on Stanleyville. The 2 and 3 platoons of the UDéf were transferred by C-47 and H-21 to the new base while 1 platoon, under Leemans and Hornaert stayed in Kindu to ensure that the airfield remained in friendly hands.

The UDéf at Punia

The airfield at Punia was no different to many of the airfields used by air units in the Congo in that it was situated in the middle of the Congolese bush. The runway was composed of laterite, providing it with a sandy-red hue and a small hut with a thatched roof served as the terminal building and communications centre. In this hut, Séverin and Wouters of the UDéf attempted to set up the means of providing contact with friendly forces.

Soldiers of the UDéf were the first Congolese government forces to arrive at Punia but later that day, they were joined by the CIA's commando force of Cuban exiles. These men and their jeeps were armed to the teeth and arrived aboard a C-130. Under Lamouline, Lima 2 arrived that night by road. Lamouline was friend of Servais from their service with Katangan forces during the province's secession. Servais announced that the attack on Stanleyville would take place the next day and that the men of the UDéf would be taking part in the operations. It proved to be a truly short night as Marc Carlier testifies:

On 24 November 1964 at 5:00, the unit boarded a C-47 and FG-869. There was a lot of equipment to be loaded on to the aircraft so finally, I had to wait until a second batch of aircraft arrived at Punia – the only white man left at Punia along with a few Congolese UDéf and around a dozen rebels captured the day before. To protect ourselves from attack by the rebels we booby-trapped a box of grenades discovered among the abandoned equipment and it was primed to explode as soon as the lid was lifted.

Things were fine until the morning when a cattle truck approached the compound. It was being driven from the direction of Punia by a young mulatto and on being pulled violently from his seat, he explained that he was a teacher employed by the Symétain Company (*Société Minière d'Etain*), a firm that provided education to employees. He claimed that he had been summoned to Punia by the rebels so that they could eliminate another "intellectual". Through his testimony we were able to deduce that there were still rebels in the town and that they had to be attacked. Although, I was only half-convinced by his story, I made up my own by telling him that reinforcements were on their way. Though this reassured the teacher, after he told me that he was going to return to place his family under my protection, I was sure that he was going to inform on us and that we, ourselves, would be attacked by the Simba.

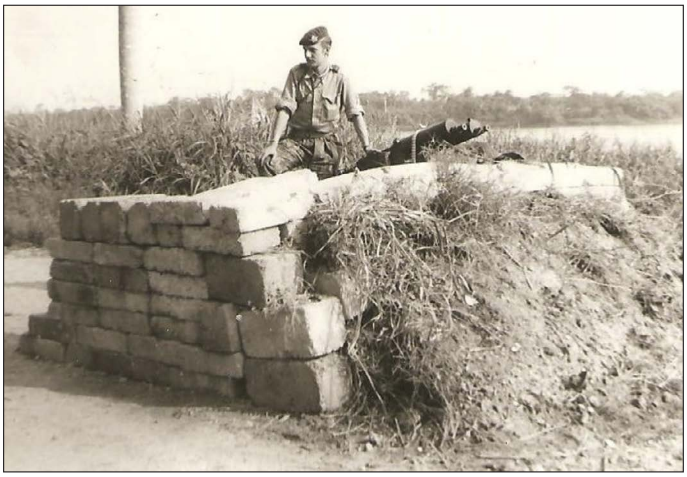
In preparation for the attack, I set up an ambush that involved Congolese UDéf members flank both sides of the road leading to the airfield. However, an hour later the teacher returned in the truck accompanied only by a woman who sat in the cab and another woman and her children in the back. With no rebels in sight, the teacher, his wife, his mother-in-law and his children become our hostages. From the opposite direction, a group of women and some old men came towards us with a goat tied to a vine, some fruit and other food. Probably inhabitants of the village I visited the day before, thanks to them I saw what was at stake and I was ready to fight to protect them.

In the afternoon, the rebels attacked us on the right flank. They advanced while shouting and shooting and I could see their hats made of animal skins and decorated with feathers. We took cover behind a truck and as they approached, I threw a grenade which made them retreat. Some rebels were left injured on the ground, they were then dispatched by my troops and stripped of their weapons and equipment.

I spent my second night in Punia sat on a box of grenades listening out for the slightest sound with only my men to protect me. I was reassured by the thought that Servais had told us that the Simba never attack in the dark.

The goat brought by the villagers lying dead on the ground and probably having died of thirst, I observed another beautiful African dawn and listened to the birds. Around noon, I heard the roar of a plane as it approached the airfield at Punia. I couldn't see its roundels and thought that it might be a Chinese aircraft – the rumours were that China was entering the conflict – so to make sure I wasn't attacked I stayed back until the aircraft had landed and one of its crew could be identified. When a crew member did disembark, I immediately recognised him as a WIGMO mechanic.

On the piece of paper he handed me, were instructions from José Schepers that I should load up my equipment and board the aircraft. The engines were still running while my soldiers and the teacher's family boarded the plane but as I attempted to load radio equipment I was pushed on to the aircraft with the words "only people". The WIGMO C-46 (9T-PLB) took off just as more Simba rebels began to appear but by that time, I was enjoying a can of Carlsberg, the best beer I'd had in a long time. As for the radio equipment and the grenades, they were left for the rebels to play with.



A soldier of the UDéf guards Simi-Simi Airfield in Stanleyville. He is armed with twin .303 Vickers machine guns. (Author's collection)

Belgian and Congolese soldiers of the UDéf. Florent Verheyden (first left), Roger Fauville (crouching with glasses) and Fernand Hollanders (crouching, first right). (Author's collection)

Post Scriptum

Though he was unaware of it at the time, Marc Carlier was the last white man to leave Punia. A lack of space meant that he was never to take part in the Dragon operations and soon he was to find himself back in Kindu. As for the airfield at Punia, it fell back into rebel hands almost as soon as UDéf forces had left and remained under Simba control until November 1965.

The teacher was confirmed to be an employee of Symétain and Carlier did have the chance to return to Punia sometime later when aboard an H-21 heading for Stanleyville. His request to recoup the left equipment was refused by the crew of the aircraft. Flying overhead the airstrip revealed dozens of corpses scattered around. The booby-trapped grenades appeared to have done their work. Discharged from the UDéf shortly after, Carlier returned to the Congo for a second time in January 1965 and left the Congo for good on 6 August of that year.

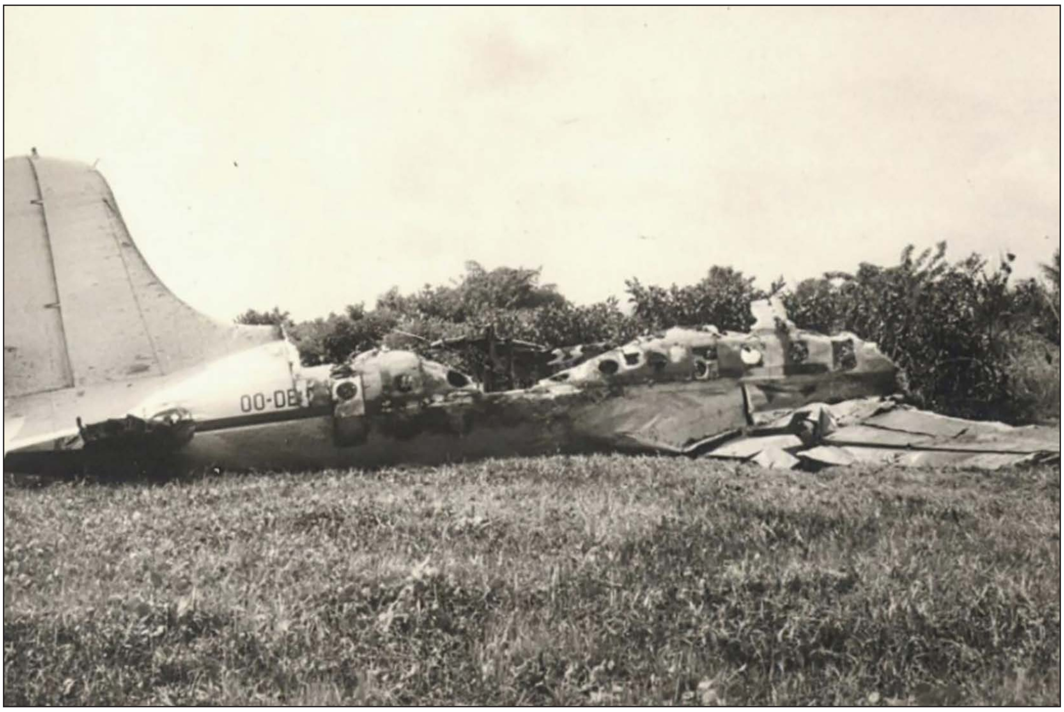
FATAC and UDéf Casualties

The operations at Stanleyville and Paulis in November 1964 were some of the deadliest regarding the FATAC and the UDéf. Alfons De Wageneer was killed at Stanleyville on the day Operation Dragon Rouge was launched; Albert Wouters was killed the next day as he tried to set up radio communications with BAKA from Simi-Simi Airfield; Lucien Welvaart was killed at Paulis on 26 November; both FATAC telecommunications technician Ferdinand Séverin and Jean Bailleux of the UDéf lost their lives at Stanleyville on 29 November. These were the first casualties following the death of René Raucroix who was killed at Wanie Rukula on 2 August 1964.

The circumstances in which Séverin and Bailleux perished are as follows. Towards the end of the day on 29 November 1964, the DC-4 (00-DEP) of the company BIAS, crashed on take-off. Crewed by pilots Léo de Bièvre and Max Coucke and with René Herman as flight mechanic, the aircraft itself was on loan from Air Congo. Four high-ranking officers of the UDéf (Séverin, Mottard, Tourré and Bailleux) were looking forward to returning to Belgium on leave from service in the Congo and the aircraft's passengers also included two Belgians who were part of the Ommegang ground forces (Lieutenant Colonel Liégois and E. Wouters). The aircraft carried documents relating to the foreign support of the Mulelist rebellion in the Kwilu province and the eagle-headed hat, worn by Christophe Gbenye, that had been found during a UDéf patrol at the former governor's residence. At the time, Marc Carlier was staying at the Guesthouse Sabena in Staleyville:

> I remember José Schepers rushing into the Sabena Guesthouse and telling us to follow him. At first, I thought that we were under attack from rebel forces and I grabbed my gun, however, in the distance at the end of the airstrip we could see a huge blaze and tracer rounds exploding as they were reached by the flames. Claude Leemans, Schepers and I jumped into the back of a pickup and arriving at the scene, we discovered the wreckage of the DC-4 which had been shot down as it attempted to take off. Some of the passengers had escaped and were trying to get away from the burning wreckage. Under fire from rebel positions in the bush around the airstrip, we managed to bundle those we had saved into the back of the pickup (Mottard, Tourré, Liégeois plus a Congolese cook from BAKA) and still under fire, we took them straight to the surgery of a local doctor named Barlovatz. He immediately began to give medical assistance to those who

Ferdinand Séverin was one of the victims of the crash of the DC-4 at Stanleyville. (Author's collection)



The wreckage of the Douglas DC-4 (00-DEP) lies on the runway at Simi-Simi Airfield, Stanleyville on 29 November 1964. This aircraft was brought down by rebel fire as it attempted to take off. Even after the capture of Stanleyville, many areas in and around the city were controlled by the Simba. (Author's collection) were the most seriously wounded but all those we saved had suffered burns and fractures and had open wounds. The doctor's surgery now surrounded by curios Congolese; I was sent back to Simi-Simi for more medical supplies. These then loaded on to the pickup, my task on the return journey to Barlovatz was to dodge sniper fire.

We worked all night long providing treatment to the wounded but at no point did we receive help from the FATAC or from the forces of the Ommegang. Where they were, I don't know but the next morning we returned to the site of the crash to find pieces of the aircraft scattered all over the runway. Fearing the worst, we discovered the bodies of Séverin, Bailleux and the entire crew of the DC-4. We placed their charred remains in makeshift coffins, then took them back to one of the hangars around the airfield.

Frozen in distress at what I had witnessed, a sharp slap on the back brought me back to earth and it was dealt by Lieutenant Colonel Vandepoel who had just arrived from BAKA. He proceeded to shake me out of my stupor and told me that this was war and that I must behave like a soldier. I was 24, I had been in the army for four years – two of which were spent at a military academy – and what I had just experienced in the last 24 hours will remain engraved in my memory forever. As for those who survived, they were repatriated to the military hospital in Brussels. Queen Fabiola of Belgium was a frequent visitor during their long rehabilitation.

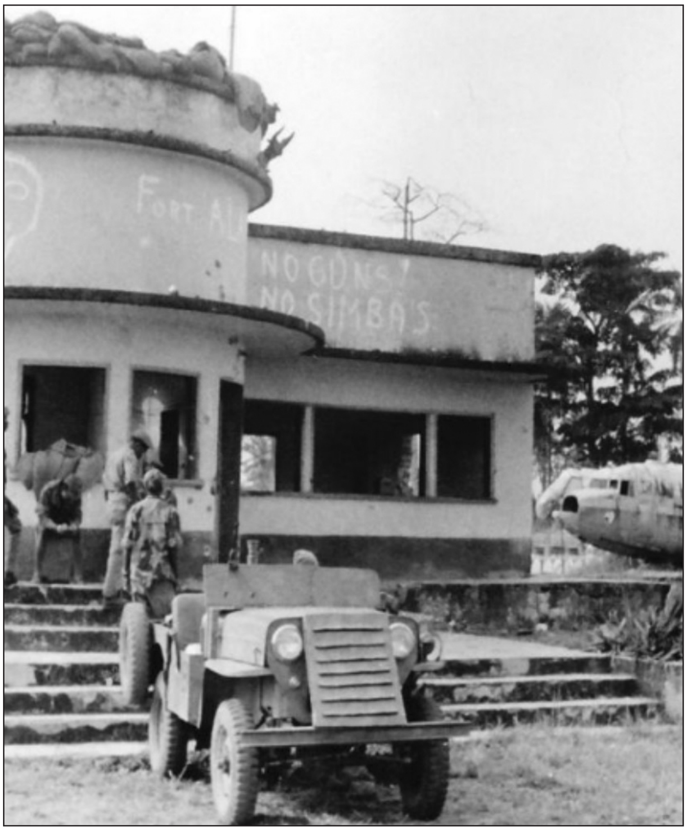
The UDéf and Operation Dragon Noir

After Operation Dragon Rouge, the only operation in which regular Belgian forces were authorised to participate in was Operation Dragon Noir. The condition being that these forces had to return to BAKA by 28 November 1964 and the objective of the mission was the rescue of 400 hostages held by the Simba at Paulis. The operation began on 26 November when seven USAF C-130s took off from Kamina loaded with 240 paratroopers and their equipment. As at Stanleyville, sections of the troops would be parachuted into the surrounding areas of the airfield, they would recapture it and make their way into the centre of the city some four kilometres away as other troops arrived to support them.

Although Dragon Noir was successful in its objectives and dozens of hostages (mainly priests and nuns) were saved, no sooner had the Belgian paratroopers left the next day that it immediately fell under rebel control. The paratroopers in their Minerva jeeps did not have the time to venture into the more far-flung localities of the city's environs that also contained hostages, so the North Ops section of the 5th Mechanised Brigade was sent in to complete a mission that remained unfinished.

Making its way to Paulis in early December 1964 and saving the lives of several hundred hostages along the way, to the north-east of Paulis at Wamba Moke, both Lieutenant Glorieux and Major Genis succumbed to their wounds after a firefight with the Simba on 9 December. Though Glorieux was killed outright, Genis died aboard an H-21 piloted by Edgard Brokken that had been dispatched to recover the wounded.

The airfield at Paulis was eventually taken by the troops of Ops Nord, on 11 December 1964. Defences were strengthened by the arrival of a company of Congolese paratroopers. The Simba attempted to retake the airport on almost a daily basis but their main attacks took place on 13 and 17 December. These attacks were repulsed with the assistance of 22 Squadron of the FAC and the UDéf was tasked with keeping the runway and the savannah around the airstrip clear so that reinforcements and supplies could be brought in. The rebels were kept at bay through the efforts of these joint forces.



The control tower at Paulis airfield. Retaken by forces of the 5th Mechanised Brigade and defended by the UDéf, the tower is daubed with the words, "No Guns, No Simbas". (Author's collection)

From 3 January 1965, two platoons of UDéf soldiers commanded by warrant officer Laurent De Coninck were responsible for keeping Paulis airfield in friendly hands. A soldier with extensive experience and a speaker of Swahili, De Coninck was promoted to the rank of captain for the duration of his mission before being replaced by Roger Scarsé and returning to Belgium at the end of May 1965.

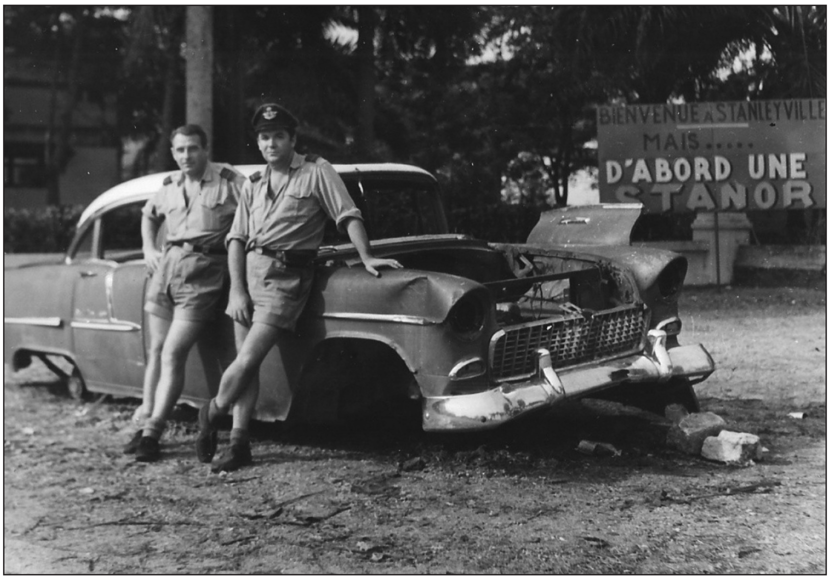
Back to Stanleyville

After the departure of the paratroopers from Stanleyville, it would take several more weeks before the situation became somewhat normalised: the bodies of dead rebels still littered the city spreading the risk of disease and stray dogs had to be shot lest they carried rabies. Still, life continued for the UDéf forces in charge of defending Stanleyville's airport against rebels buoyed by the shooting down of the BIAS DC-4 who were convinced that tribal witchcraft and magic potions would provide protection from any bullets fired by the UDéf. These Simba launched nightly attacks and focused their efforts on the end of the runway furthest from the town. Those that succumbed, despite the promise of invincibility, were left where they fell. To get rid of this continuing threat, Servais set up a joint operation with 22 Squadron of the FAC with the goal of pushing the rebels back to the Congo River where the UDéf lay in wait. Perched on the hood of a jeep left behind by Belgian paratroopers, Servais commanded the operation while Carlier awaited instructions with the rest of his platoon. A Simba approached the unit shouting and gesticulating in typical Simba fashion but even after being shot four times, the rebel still managed to have the energy to throw his spear. The spear was kept as a souvenir of Carlier's time in the Congo.

At the beginning of December 1964, the situation in Stanleyville was particularly dangerous. Brussels did not want to lose soldiers in

The bodies of slain Simba around Simi-Simi Airfield in Stanleyville in November 1964. The deteriorating corpses were another health hazard faced by UDéf forces defending the airfield. (Author's collection)

Simba rebels had been convinced by tribal witchdoctors that they were invincible in battle and invisible to enemy bullets. Daily rations of hemp and magic potions called a *dawa* did not however, protect them from the reality of the situation. (Author's collection)



FATAC servicemen pictured in Stanleyville. The sign behind them reads "Welcome to Stanleyville but … first, a Stanor". Beer such as Stanor played a vital role in maintaining morale. (Author's collection)

operations for fear of being accused of neo-colonialism. All the while, the international press underlined the presence of rebels around the city and the notion that without Belgian paratroopers, Stanleyville was in grave danger of being retaken by the Simba. Moreover, Belgian journalists reported that many of the ANC were on the verge of deserting. Nonetheless, the FATAC's commander gave the order for his troops to leave Stanleyville and head back to BAKA. It was an order that greatly displeased men of the UDéf such as Servais, Hornaert, Leemans and Carlier. Despite their disobeying a direct order, they had no intention of following it as it specified leaving the Congolese members of the UDéf behind to face the rebel forces. To enforce his order, Vandepoel flew to Stanleyville aboard 9T-PKF and demanded that his officers return with him the next day. After drawn-out discussions, it was decided that Servais would remain with the Congolese UDéf.

In another turn of events, three of the men who had just left Stanleyville returned the following day. One of them was Marc Carlier:

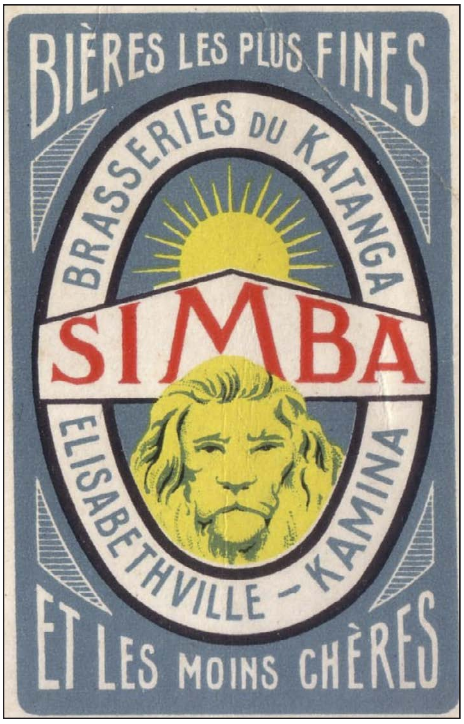
> While we were on patrol, a 14-year-old boy named Isodore came up to me and told me that he was hiding at his school to avoid being enlisted as a rebel soldier, the fate of many of his classmates. He told me his family originated from Bukavu but not knowing where to turn next, he followed the patrol back to Simi-Simi where I put him on a plane to BAKA. At Kamina, he was handed over to the police but later, I was able to send him to Bukavu aboard a C-47 to join his family. By way of thanks, they sent me a letter describing in detail the sad plight of children who had been coerced into joining the Simbas.

The UDéf Expands

Depending on the extent of operations, more and more FATAC crews were sent to other parts of the Congo. The crews in question demanding protection from potential attacks, more defence units were set up after the return of Lieutenant Colonel Emile Bouzin to the ANC's HQ in Leopoldville on 16 January 1965. The airfield at Stanleyville was to benefit from the new provisions and acted as the hub for operations in the north-east of the Congo. In March 1965, 3 Platoon of the UDéf commanded by Major Alain Blume, was sent to defend the airfield at Bunia. As this airfield became an important operational base for 22 Squadron, the number of UDéf platoons rose to four and the total number of UDéf personnel now consisted of one officer, nine Belgian NCOs and some 500 Congolese. A mortar platoon was based at the airfields at Stanleyville and Paulis while a reconnaissance platoon was also based at Stanleyville. At BAKA, forces were strengthened by the formation of a platoon of military police.

Rest and Relaxation for the UDéf

Fernand Hollanders:



Simba beer brewed in Elisabethville and Kamina was one of the most popular. Ironically, the name 'Simba' proved to mean a friend and a foe. (Author's collection)

As well as the beer that was on offer, the men of the FATAC found time for visits to the beautiful landscapes of the Congo. Here, they enjoy the sights provided by the bridge over the Tshopo River in north-western Congo. (Author's collection)

We never ran out of beer during my service with the FATAC. The driving force in the lives of the Congolese, the UDéf and the rebels, beer was undoubtedly one of the safest drinks since it protected us from germs: the water used by the brewery had been chemically treated and the bottles had been sterilised. We drank the beer straight from the bottle and avoided using a cup or a glass that might have been contaminated. In Stanleyville, there were two main breweries: Brastan (Stanleyville Brewery) produced Stanor beer while another named Bralima (Brewery, Lemonade and Malt) brewed Primus beer. It was important to have a good relationship with one of the two breweries.

One day, the Brastan brewery asked me to escort a Stanor truck well beyond Simi-Simi and towards Yangambi where our advanced defence post was located. According to the brewer, there was a danger of the area running out of beer, so I got into the UDéf's Chevrolet pickup and packed a few grenades in the glove box. The UDéf soldiers who greeted us were wary of our arrival and had drawn their weapons, however, this was one of the safest patrols I had ever made on the Congo. On our return, we drank Stanor for free and concluded that the presence of a brewery was one way of guaranteeing the safety of the brewer.

7

Mobutu's Congo

From the time of Mobutu's second coup d'état in November 1965, all political parties were forbidden from taking part in the political activities of the Congo. This order had to be strictly observed and in 1966, Mobutu transformed the Congolese state into a presidential regime. The conversion required a radical reorganisation of the country as well as the elimination of individuals who viewed these reforms in a negative light. To help survey the population and keep a lid on any political movement acting against Mobutu's interests, the *Corps des Volontaires de la République* (CVR) was formed on 9 January 1966. A youth movement accessible to all young people, in English the abbreviation stands for 'National Conscience, Vigilance and Reconstruction'. In practice, the CVR's followers would mainly serve as informers for the State Security.

Abolishing the parliament was a rather difficult matter. With this in mind, Mobutu proclaimed a state of exception and from that moment ruled the Congo by presidential decree surrounding himself with young academics and the staff of the ANC. They would be the ones who would make sure his orders were abided by.

On 30 May 1966, what was called the 'Pentecost plot' was discovered. Some politicians were alleged to be plotting against the new regime and Mobutu's reaction was to have them arrested. The men involved were ex-Prime Minister Evariste Kimba, ex-Minister of Defence Jérôme Anany, ex-minister of the Lumumba government, Alexandre Mahamba and Emmanuel Bamba, an ex-minister who had served in the Adoula government. A sham trial followed. The four defendants were sentenced to death after a few minutes of deliberation and two days later on 2 June, they were publicly executed at Leopoldville's main football stadium. The number of spectators was estimated at 300,000. From that moment on, everyone knew who the leader was and what to expect if they did not comply with the leader's wishes.

The new regime confirmed its authority by enacting several measures that made it clear to foreigners that the Congo had reached a turning point in its history. To reflect these changes, many of the cities and towns changed their names as a sign the Congo was rejecting the past and looking to a future without the influence of European colonial powers, especially Belgium. As for the Belgian forces that were still serving in the Congo, the opening months of 1966 were relatively calm for FATAC crews. The H-21s that arrived in 1964 had all been lost in accidents and the C-47s were mainly limited to flying 'milk runs' since the bulk of the Simba's operations had ceased and government forces controlled the majority of the Congo.

Nevertheless, in January 1966, a detachment of the FATAC was deployed to Albertville to support the offensive operations of Ops Sud which had started in September 1965 and would continue until December 1966. Captain R. Baccaert was the commander of this detachment and he and his staff had a remarkably busy time between 20 January and 10 March 1966 flying 86 missions and 183 flying hours.

Raymond Baccaert (pilot):

> At the end of January 1966, the new commander of BAKA, Colonel Steve Cailleau, asked me to go to Albertville with 9T-PKH to provide logistical support for Ops Sud. Lieutenant Colonel R. Hardenne was the commander of a combat unit composed of mercenaries and ANC soldiers that was supervised by Belgian soldiers and his mission was to pacify the entire northern and north-western part of Lake Tanganyika. I was happy to accept the mission as it meant I didn't have to stay in Kamina. I knew R. Hardenne quite well as 15 Wing and the Belgian Parachute Regiment always worked well together. He entrusted me with the command of his FATAC detachment, including my crew and about 20 UDéf.
>
> Once we had arrived in Albertville, the FATAC crew was quartered at a comfortable hotel in the city while others stayed at a rented villa. My navigator Bernard Thomas took care of the administrative tasks which allowed me to concentrate on my operational work. This was made easier by there being no commercial flights into Albertville and only the B-26s and T-28s of the Makasi using the airstrip.
>
> Our duties at Albertville usually consisted of making two flights a day – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. This was more than enough since the circumstances in which we were operating, meant we had to keep our wits about us. The same was true even at the base. One day, on our return from a mission, we parked in front of a 22 Squadron B-26. Its crew was busy loading the onboard weapons with ammunition and my flight engineer A. Hermans, had climbed onto the wing of our plane to refuel. I told him to wait a little longer but no sooner had he come down, than a round from one of the B-26's guns was fired off and hit our C-47. A wing had to be replaced and Hermans could count his lucky stars.
>
> The missions requested by Ops South HQ were dropping supplies by parachute or carrying out 'free drops' from low altitudes on to small drop zone and airfields such as Bondo, Lembo-Katanga, Yungu, Kibamba, Kasimia, Baraka, Fizi, Lubondja, Bendera, Lulimba, Muhala, Mulolwa, Ramazani, Kenge, Kimano and Lengwe. Each mission was a challenge for the crew but especially for the navigator who also acted as co-pilot. My navigator was Bernard Thomas. He was an immense help to me. We sometimes flew the wrong DZ as we had to maintain a low altitude to avoid the detection of the rebels.
>
> One mission I remember in particular took place on 12 February 1966. A South Ops unit found itself completely surrounded by the rebels on the Fizi ridge and was in urgent need of ammunition. Hardenne asked me to go and drop some for the beleaguered soldiers but I replied that we were only able to carry out logistical missions. Our job was not to fly into battle zones under fire. Nonetheless, as the unit in question was made up of Belgians, I agreed to go on the condition that Hardenne put his authorisation for the mission in writing. I should say that, in practice, there is little difference between logistical and operational missions. The sky was very low that day but that didn't stop us from leaving and dropping box after box of ammunition. The Belgian unit was holed up in a large villa on the ridge, so we had to drop the crates into the garden. As for the 'free drops', each manoeuvre had to be carried out with precision and considering the volume and weight of each box so that it did not hit the aircraft. As this could have resulted in the loss of lives and the dispatcher was always Congolese, I would send a mechanic to help him to make sure everything went to plan.

Emile Janssens (flight engineer):

> From March to May 1966, I carried out my second tour with the FATAC and flew on 9T-PKA with Antoine Devisscher as pilot, Firmin Carpels as navigator and Eddy Deroeck as the onboard radio operator. At Kamina, the head of the FATAC was Colonel Steve Cailleau, assisted by Major Raymond Van Keymeulen and Major Pierre Uyttenhove and most of the time we flew to airfields in Ingi Buta, Goma, Niangara, Kongolo and Punia, all located in eastern Congo.
>
> On April 2, 1966, along with two other C-47s, we flew to the small airfield at Kamipini owned by farmer and stockbreeder Daniel Demaeght. Our mission being to pick up supplies of potatoes, on landing our aircraft took a turn that was a little too wide and one wheel left the runway and sank into the ground. The propeller not being damaged, with me at the controls of the aircraft we then received help from a father from the neighbouring Christian mission, some sheets of metal to slide under the wheel of the aircraft, plus much pushing and shoving with the help of local Congolese. Only then did I realise I still had my foot on the brakes. Despite my *faux pas* and everyone around me dripping with sweat from their efforts, we were invited to spend the night at the mission station and the next day we returned to BAKA via Albertville with our mission having been completed.
>
> During stopovers in Bukavu we often stayed at the Hotel Riviera and ate at a restaurant run by an old European lady named Poupette who was radiant and authoritative at the same time. Here, we used to pay with worked malachite that we had picked up in Elisabethville.
>
> Another event I remember distinctly was when we were preparing to take off from Paulis and when the control tower asked us to take on board two extra passengers. Opening the door, I saw Jean Schramme and Bob Denard who had been asked to go to Stanleyville on urgent business. The control tower had waited until the last moment to ask for permission to take them on board to avoid any discussion or, maybe, for security reasons.

Jean Hoogewijs (radio specialist):

After arriving at BAKA in early April 1966, I was then sent to Paulis. The small airfield just outside the town now guarded by mercenaries, Colonel Steve Cailleau gave me the order to set up a point-to-point radio link between Paulis and Kamina.

A C-47 loaded with a radio set complete with transmitter and receiver, wires and cables, took me to Paulis and I had also been given money to hire some Congolese. Since I had received few instructions, I felt like a sort of secret agent. The flight to Paulis was perfect but the landing less so. First, the pilot flew over the airfield at high altitude, then at extremely low altitude. There was no movement on the ground and we were not being shot at. However, the runway was cluttered with objects, so the pilot had to weigh up where he was going to land. Immediately after pulling up close to some barrels of fuel, a jeep full of mercenaries pulled up next to the aircraft. They were polite and spoke English and after telling them about my mission they offered to set up my radio equipment in the local Palmolive factory. Nonetheless, since the factory was too far from the airfield, I decided to set up in a deserted villa near the runway.

The next day before they left, the mercenaries helped me hire some French-speaking Congolese. We immediately began setting up the installation and two of the men I had employed climbed up palm trees on which to attach the dipole antenna. Once the transmitter and receiver were connected, I had my first contact with BAKA and reported that the station was operational. I was told that, as planned, a C-47 would bring the rest of the equipment as soon as the runway was completely free of obstacles. This was done a few days later. I then announced to Kamina that the runway was clear and ordered some European food at the same time. The same day, a C-47 landed with the equipment, food, beer and whiskey. The crew was in awe of my radio station but did not dare to taste the palm wine I had received from the Congolese.

War in the Congo Brews Once More

If the first half of 1966 was relatively calm, the same cannot be said of the second half of the year. It was entirely predictable that the deposed prime minister would not leave the Congo to Mobutu without putting up a fight. Stanleyville – now Kisangani – was to become the centre of many bloody encounters in which the FATAC was indirectly but no less intensely involved. Most of the Congo was now pacified except for the east where a few hotbeds of rebellion lingered. With trouble brewing, Colonel Cailleau sent a detachment

Airmen of the FATAC relax at Chez Poupette in Bukavu. Run by a European, payment for food was made using worked malachite, a semi-precious stone found in Katanga. (Author's collection)

ALBERTVILLE

The airfield at Albertville served as a base for many airborne operations throughout 1966. The FATAC was not the only air unit to have a detachment based here; 22 Squadron of the FAC also used it to station T-28s, B-26 Invaders and Bell-47 helicopters involved in missions in eastern Congo. (Author's collection) of the FATAC from BAKA and posted them in Kisangani to provide supplies to ANC posts in north-eastern Congo.

In Kisangani, the FATAC's detachment commander was Major Pierre Uytenhove who was assisted by Major Pol Libeer, his operations officer. The personnel were housed at the Congo Palace Hotel and there were two crews in total. The first (9T-PKF) consisted of Bob Podevijn (captain), Rik Pootemans (navigator), Léon Bergmans (radio operator) and Rufin Keirse (flight engineer), while the second was made up of Michel Géruzet (captain), Jan Baras (navigator), Claude Morleghem (radio operator) and Louis Alpaerts (flight engineer). The missions for these crews began on 17 July 1966.

At the time the crews arrived, two sets of ANC troops were based in the city. On the one hand was the ANC unit that had formed part of the 5th Mechanised Brigade commanded by Colonel Damien Tshatshi and on the other, the Baka Regiment commanded by Colonel Tshipola. The latter composed mainly of Baluba tribesmen from Katanga. Formerly part of Moïse Tshombe's armed forces, they had been considered in a good light while Tshombe had been prime minister but fell out of favour once Mobutu became president. Becoming clear that Mobutu would rather they not form part of his own forces, the Baka Regiment consisted of four battalions of commandos each under the command of a Katangan officer. To add to an already tense situation given that Tshatshi and Tshipola despised each other, into the mix fell around 40 mercenaries of 6 Commando commanded by Bob Denard assisted by Major Bob Noddyn.

The FATAC's First Mission in Kisangani: the René Wautier Incident

On 20 July, an unknown European arrived at the Congo Palace Hotel. The FATAC crews learnt he was a Belgian and also discovered he had been seriously wounded following the accidental discharge of his rifle. The Congo possessing only two hospitals worthy of the name – one in Kinshasa (Leopoldville) and the other in Lubumbashi (Elisabethville), the crew of 9T-PKF commanded by Podevijn and seconded by Michel Géruzet, was ordered to fly south to Lubumbashi as quickly as possible. Although night flights were forbidden because of the lack of navigational tools and because of Simi-Simi's poor infrastructure, the take-off was assisted by using the lights on the vehicles of the mercenaries to shine light on the runway at regular intervals. Taking off at 0150hrs, the aircraft first made radio contact with Kinshasa and was ordered to change direction and head for the capital. Unfortunately, it was too late: Wauthier passed away at 0220hrs.

Who was René Wautier?

Originally from Morlanwelz in Belgium, this 39-year-old former army officer had been transferred to the Belgian Air Force reserve in 1958 with the rank of captain-commander. A veteran of the Katangese secession, he had remained loyal to Tshombe and was rewarded by being appointed as a major and the 2IC of 11 Commando, one of the four battalions that made up the Baka Regiment.

During the night of 20–21 July, he was in his room with a certain Lieutenant Pascal and was reportedly accidentally injured while handling a weapon. Pascal was arrested on his return to Belgium and suspected of shooting Wauthier, was arrested and prosecuted. He was exonerated through a lack of evidence.

Léon Bergmans remembers:

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAISE

Léon Bergman (right) stands with other FATAC crew in front of 9T-PKF at N'Djili after the evacuation of the Belgian mercenary, René Wautier. (Author's collection)

> Though my logbook contains the records of around 60 flights I made in the Congo, the night flight from Kisangani to Kinshasa on 20––21 July 1966 is one that stands out in my mind. The details of the flight have become slightly blurred due the passage of time and some of them may be slightly inaccurate. However, I will try to reconstruct the story to the best of my ability.
>
> It must have been around 23:00 when I was awakened by the service telephone at the Congo Palace Hotel. I was asked to pack my things and go down to the bar immediately. Staying on the second floor of the hotel, at first, I thought one of my colleagues was playing a joke on me rather than me being called for a real mission. After all, how could anyone think of taking off in the middle of the night from an unlit runway covered in tropical fog with visibility down to a few dozen metres? In fact, flying at night in Africa was normally out of the question. I hung up and tried to get some sleep.
>
> A few minutes later, the phone rang again and the voice on the other end said excitedly, "Léon, are you almost ready?" I then realised that something special was happening, I grabbed my pack and I went to the bar of the hotel where I met the other members of the crew. Here, we were given rather vague information about the nature of the mission we were about to undertake and knew nothing of the political aspects linked to the operation. It turned out that, for some time, there had been rumours about a rebellion that was to be initiated by Katangese troops on 20–21 July. A violent dispute between Tshombe's and Mobutu's supporters was at the root of a quarrel in which the Belgian mercenary René Wautier had been shot by another Belgian mercenary, a certain 'Serge' for whom I had brought safari shoes from Leopoldville a few days earlier. He was about 25 years old with red hair and came from Belgium's Namur region. According to the information provided, the victim was seriously injured and had to be evacuated as quickly as possible to Lubumbashi for political reasons.
>
> We arrived at the airfield shortly before midnight and after a half-hour wait, a pickup truck arrived carrying Wautier who was covered in bandages. He was placed on 9T-PKF under the supervision of the mercenaries' doctor, Captain Renato and I heard Wauthier say weakly that he wanted to be killed, something that, obviously, we could not do. A few minutes after take-off we were ordered to head for Kinshasa rather than Lubumbashi but around 02:30 hours a mercenary accompanying Wauthier emerged from

the back with his arms crossed in the air and announced that Wauthier was dead. I noted the death in the logbook.

It later turned out that he had only a small chance of survival even if the flight route had not been changed. Although we could only fly "on time and heading", we held our course well because after five hours, we saw the reflections of the Congo River and then our landing point, N'Djili Airport. When we landed, we found that the runaway was swarming with cars with armed military personnel. Major Wautier's remains were transported in an ambulance and the mercenary accompanying him was placed under arrest. The next day we returned to Stanleyville.

All Hell Breaks Loose in Kisangani

On the morning of 23 July, a mortar duel broke out between 11 Commando and the Baka Regiment resulting in the death of two white mercenaries and six Congolese. While this incident was taking place, two aircraft of the FATAC (9T-PKB and 9T-PKF) were on their way to Bambili and Kisangani respectively. Piloted by Michel Géruzet, 9T-PKF contacted the control tower to ask for permission to land but was told that under the circumstances, this would be impossible. The aircraft then diverted to Buta, the nearest airport guarded by a detachment of mercenaries and radio contact was made with the crew of 9T-PKB who decided to stay put and await further instructions.

This was fortunate as the next morning, 120 ANC soldiers loyal to Colonel Tshatshi attacked the headquarters of the Baka Regiment. The attack resulted in heavy losses for the ANC and Colonel Tshatshi was killed. In the meantime, radio contacts had taken place between Colonel Tshipola (Baka Regiment) and Kinshasa. He would only talk with Prime Minister Mulamba and he wanted to make it clear that neither the mercenaries nor FATAC had anything to do with what had taken place. This did not stop Mobutu arresting any mercenary he could lay his hands on. They were violently attacked with five of them killed.

Léon Bergmans (onboard radio operator), testifies:

On 23 July we flew from Stanleyville to Bambili to supply the mercenaries. When we took off on our return flight, we received information in English from the flight director in Kisangani, "Not possible to land at Stan, get a diversion". When we asked what was happening, we were told succinctly in English, "There is trouble". On hearing this we performed a "one-eighty" and headed back in Bambili. The escalation of the unrest in Stanleyville forced us to stay for a few days with the mercenaries who were stationed in Bambili and who were under the orders of the Spanish Major Velasco and his deputy, medical officer Captain Renato. These two officers were executed in Leopoldville in October 1967 for high treason.

We did, however, return to Kisangani three days later and we saw immediately that indeed there was 'trouble'. Machine gun

CE AERIENNE CONGOLAIS
PKF

9T-PKF was caught up in fighting between mercenaries, the Baka Regiment of the ANC and a faction of the ANC loyal to Colonel Tshatshi. Here, it is pictured with two of its previous crew members, navigator Albert Williquet and pilot Emile Honnay. (Author's collection)

9T-PKB was also caught up in the internal dispute. Its service with the FATAC ended when it was impounded by Congolese authorities in late July 1967. (Author's ocllection)

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FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAIS

9T-PKG was transferred from the FATAC to the FAC in May 1967. Shown here with its crew at Albertville. It was manned by the crew of 9T-PKB from August 1966. (Author's collection)

emplacements manned by the Baka Regiment had been set up on both sides of the runway and it is easy to imagine what happened to the aircraft and the crews that landed: the planes themselves were grounded, while personnel were held hostage at the Congo Palace Hotel.

On the morning of 24 July, radio contact was made between Kisangani and 9T-PKF in Buta. Major P. Uytenhove ordered the crew to return as soon as possible to Kisangani and on its arrival Major Pol Libeer gave a briefing at which he explained the situation. As soon as he had begun, a C-47 carrying Mulamba landed at Kisangani in an attempt to bring calm. He was approached by soldiers of the Baka Regiment with a machine gun pointed at him but Mulamba showed that he was not afraid by crossing his arms and waiting. A few minutes later, Mulamba was in a jeep and on his way to begin negotiations.

What took place at the airfield became a subject of discussion for the FATAC crews in the second floor bar of the Congo Palace. They learnt that Mulamba was to be given a room at the hotel and through the windows they could see that the hotel was surrounded with soldiers of the Baka holding an arsenal of weapons, including mortars. This did not bode well as the Belgians had only GP pistols with which to defend themselves. After some deliberation, they decided to set up defences in the central hall on the fifth floor. Since a possible attack could only come from the central staircase, they felt that this was the most suitable place to defend and the most secure from mortar fire.

Jan Baras describes the conditions:

There was a strong smell of exhaust fumes and an infernal noise. In the large central hall area, there were two jeeps with their engines running and they were nose-to-nose with their machine guns pointing at each other. I followed the discussions between an officer of the Baka and Belgian mercenary Marc Goossens from Ostend.

Trusted by the men of the FATAC, when 11 Commando mercenary Marc Goosens was warned by the ANC that, "There are two thousand of us here and we will kill you all", Goossens laconically replied that, "There are two hundred of us here and we will eat all two thousand of you.

When Jan Baras asks if the FATAC people can be of any use, Goossens replied, "Easy, easy, it will calm down".

As a result, the crews of the FATAC and Mulamba were protected against possible aggressors by the mercenaries. Mulamba's first and only result was that the troops of the Baka agreed to a provisional truce. Next, Mulamba commandeered 9T-PKF and its crew and the aircraft was used to drop hastily written leaflets over the warring parties on two occasions. In these messages written in French, Swahili and Lingala, Mulamba called on everyone to cease fire.

The next day, the 26 July, Major Uytenhove ordered the crew of 9T-PKF to go to Bambili and to pass on the order that 9T-PKB was to return Kisangani immediately. On 27 July, Mulamba and Tshipola agreed to have the wounded evacuated by the two FATAC aircraft: The 9T-PKF went to Lubumbashi (Elisabethville) with wounded soldiers of the Baka Regiment while 9T-PKB took wounded ANC to N'Djili.

The reception in Lubumbashi was not very warm. The crew of 9T-PKF was arrested and taken to barracks near the airfield and

FORCE AERIENNE CONGOLAISE
PKB

The C-54 (DC-4) serial numbered 9T-THZ awaits civilians attempting to escape the fighting at Kisangani in the summer of 1966. The 9T-PKB can be seen in the background as soldiers of the ANC look on. (Author's collection)

thus followed discussions with Mobutu about what should be their fate. Luckily, Mobutu's decision swung in favour of the men of the FATAC and the C-47 was authorised to take off. Kamina was the only place the aircraft could head and despite having to use emergency lighting for the night flight, anything was better than staying at Lubumbashi. As for 9T-PKB, its arrival at N'Djili initially went without a hitch and as night fell, the crew decided to spend the night in Kinshasa. The next afternoon, the C-47 took off but without the medical supplies it was due to transport back to Kisangani.

During the first contact it made with the control tower at Simi-Simi, the crew was told that it was pointless for them to return and the aircraft headed back to N'Djili. Here, the aircraft was impounded by the local ANC and the crew flown back to BAKA aboard a C-124 of the USAF on 3 August 1966. The 9T-PKB's service with the FATAC ending with its seizure, its crew resumed missions aboard 9T-PKG on 4 August. From that moment, it was decided that the FATAC would adopt a more neutral position in the Congo Crisis; its aircraft would only be used for logistical purposes and for the benefit of both sides of the Baka Regiment–ANC dispute. This did not stop Tshipola from requisitioning 9T-PKF on August 5 and 6 to scour the area around Kisangani for hours and look for possible reinforcements on their way to join the ANC.

The Evacuation of Europeans from Kisangani

Since Kisangani had once more become the site of serious confrontation – this time between warring factions of the same army – no one could foresee how the situation would evolve. A number of Europeans still resided in the city and Colonel Steve Cailleau, along with Bob Denard, decided to take the joint decision that as many of them as possible would be evacuated without the respective factions having any knowledge. Each time a FATAC plane flew in and out of Kisangani, a small number of Europeans would be loaded on board while others left behind were encouraged to change clothes frequently to give the impression that Europeans were not leaving and there were as many as before.

By 21 September, the only Europeans left in the city were Denard's mercenaries and Europeans who refused to leave their businesses. In the meantime, Kinshasa was preparing to take back control of Kisangani from the Baka Regiment. The first parachute battalion landed in the port of Bumba to march on Kisangani via Banalia and Denard took the decision to join them by seizing Simi-Simi. Things did not all go to plan with his 2IC, Bob Noddyn being seriously wounded. However, Tshipola and the Baka Regiment were forced to leave the city the next day.

The evacuation according to Léon Hadermann:

> From the beginning of the rebellion of the Baka Regiment, aircraft were forbidden to fly into Kisangani from Kinshasa. After much toing and froing, I did, nevertheless, finally receive permission to make a return flight in a C-54 (9T-THZ) on 11–12 August 1966. This was on the condition that I take three tons of foodstuffs on each outbound flight. As for the evacuation of people, this proved to be problematic as so many wanted to leave Kisangani. To overcome this, navigator Freddy Huggenberger stood at the foot of the stairs with a scale belonging to the airport to note the exact weight of the passengers and their luggage in order to avoid finding ourselves overloaded. Often the passengers' luggage had to be left behind as the aircraft was becoming too heavy for take-off.

Things did not look good for the Baka Regiment. They numbered around 2,500 and with their base in Kisangani now under ANC control, they had nowhere to go. Finally, they marched south-eastwards to Punia, a region controlled by Jean Schramme and his so-called 'Leopard Battalion'. In the hope of finding a solution, Schramme was to contact authorities in Kinshasa and on 10 October, after talks with General Bobozo, a compromise was reached: Schramme was to choose 300 soldiers of the regiment to bolster his own force while the remainder would be disarmed and return to Katanga. Meanwhile, the Baka Regiment's two most senior officers, Tshipola and Mwambu, travelled to Kinshasa to provide their versions of the events.

This did not go well: Mwambu was shot as soon as he arrived in the capital and Tshipola was imprisoned and later executed. As for the 2,200 soldiers making their way back home, they were intercepted by the ANC and massacred. Another victim of the rebellion was Prime Minister Mulamba. He was removed from office because it was thought he had been too tolerant of the Baka Regiment's demands.

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The FATAC and the Mercenary Revolt of 1967

The rebellion in Kisangani having ended, Mobutu began to become wary of any force that challenged his authority – that represented a danger. As a consequence, the UDéf units stationed at Simi-Simi were disarmed by the ANC and had to be evacuated to Kamina. The strength of FATAC was reduced to three C-47s plus maintenance personnel with one being based in Kisangani and the other two at BAKA.

Except for a few isolated incidents in eastern Congo, by the end of 1966, the rebellion was practically under control. Mobutu was wary of any force that could potentially challenge his authority but he held the reins of power firmly in his hands by eliminating any public display of sedition. The most far-reaching changes Mobutu made to strengthen his hold was the setting up of the Popular Movement of the Revolution (*MPR*), or *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* on 17 April 1967. By October of that year, the *MPR* controlled all the administrative organs on central and provincial levels, a power that extended to trade unions and a branch named the *MPR* Youth, or *Jeunesse Populaire MPR*.

The vast majority of English-speaking mercenaries having left the Congo, Mobutu decided the time had come to get rid of the remaining, mainly French-speaking, soldiers of fortune. For one thing, the use of mercenaries tarnished the image of the Congo that Mobutu wanted the world and the Organisation of African Unity, to see. (In 1967, Mobutu became this organisation's president.) Secondly, Mobutu believed he no longer needed them given the size of the forces still available to Laurent-Désiré Kabila in the Fizi region of the Congo.

At the same time, Mobutu was not certain that Jean Schramme and Bob Denard were still good allies despite their having lent him support to ward off the revolt of the Baka Regiment in Kisangani on 22 July 1966. Finally, with the help of foreign cooperation, the ANC was now better equipped to deal with internal strife. With Schramme and Denard still in the Maniema region and Kisangani respectively, the last step in Mobutu's plan was to ensure that they could not muster support for a mercenary-led rebellion that sought to empower Mobutu's greatest rival, Moïse Tshombe. The latter was now exiled once more in Spain. It is for this reason that Mobutu ordered the massacre of the Katanganese troops of the Baka Regiment.

To test the waters, on 29 December 1966, Mobutu summoned both Schramme and Denard to Kinshasa. He proposed that their respective units be disbanded and integrated into the ANC but this suggestion only brought about strong resistance. The situation was left as it was but nonetheless, the growing sense of distrust between Mobutu and the mercenary leaders was further aggravated.

As the Maniema region had been pacified, it was placed under the civilian authority of the Congolese government in Kinshasa and normal life was able to resume. Schramme could not accept that an all-controlling authority was able to interfere in the daily running of the territory that he owned and exploited as a planter.

In March 1967, he was visited by a South African mercenary by the name of Jeremiah Puren with the objective of studying the possibility of overthrowing Mobutu. In Puren, Schramme found what he thought to be the perfect ally; the South African had been a pilot with Tshombe's *Force Aérienne Katangaise* (FAK) and had also served as head of the FAC's 21 Squadron. A staunch supporter of Tshombe from the early days of the Katangese secession of July 1960, Puren claimed he could raise 50 fighter bombers and 300 South African commandos to do the job. However, Schramme did not trust Puren and refused the proposal. This decision turned out for the best as, in the end, all Puren could muster was a DC-4 loaded with ammunition and a dozen mercenaries.

Jean Schramme was the commander of 10 Commando, aka the Leopard Battalion (Alchetron).

Mobutu and Bob Denard in discussion in December 1966. (Author's collection)

At the end of April 1967, Schramme received a second visit, this time from Bob Denard. An adventurer with connections to French secret services, Schramme expressed his disapproval of Denard attacking the Baka Regiment. However, in view of the context that Mobutu was creating, the two decided to put their differences aside. Moreover, Denard had reliable information that Mobutu had the intention of getting rid of Schramme and all mercenaries in the Congo by killing them if necessary.

On 22 June 1967, a second visit from Denard brought the news that a ceremony was to be held in Kisangani on 5 July to inaugurate a river boat named in honour of Colonel Tshatshi, the commander of the Baka Regiment. The ceremony was to be followed by a large military parade and would be attended by 800 paratroopers of the ANC's 3rd Battalion. Seen as a declaration of war by Schramme and Denard, they decided to launch a joint revolt on 5 July before the ANC troops could realise what was happening. The plan was for mercenaries to attack Kisangani, Bukavu and Kindu at the same time at dawn on the given day and once this objective had been reached, they would advance and take over the rest of Congo. On 5 July 1967, a FATAC detachment was in Kisangani while another was in Bukavu. They both became caught up in the ensuing fighting.

The FATAC in Kisangani, 1967

Though the number of FATAC crews had been greatly reduced by the end of 1966, at the beginning of July 1967 two C-47s were in the city either as part of a continuing mission or as a relief crew: 9T-PKF (Etienne Lemmens, Theofiel Naets, Jacques Beankens and Auguste Janssens) had been in Kisangani since 23 May, while 9T-PKC (Roger Verbeeck, Théo Roloux, Antonio Fernandez and Edmond De Rauw) arrived on 1 July. The head of the FATAC detachment in Kisangani was Commander Laurent Hallyn, the air traffic controller was Captain René Lenglez and six mechanics completed a detachment that was housed at the Hôtel des Chutes near the River Congo.

In addition to the Belgian force, a number of Cuban exiles could be found in Kisangani. They piloted a C-47 (9Q-CUH) operated by Air Congo and flown by former 22 Squadron pilot, Francisco Alvarez, two T-28s operated by 22 Squadron. A fourth air force, Vicicongo, was represented by a Piper Aztec (9Q-CQJ). As for the Bukavu region, a third FATAC crew (Claude Roekhaut, René Meylemans, Guy Depaire and Willy Tison) had arrived aboard 9T-PKI on 3 July. Its role was to supply the north-eastern areas of the Congo. As Bukavu did not possess an airfield worthy of the name, this crew operated out of Kamembe airfield just over the border in Rwanda. Back at base, the FATAC still included around 50 men. They were commanded by Major Claude Buisseret.

Events as noted in the diary of Claude Roekhaut (9T-PKI):

Wednesday, 5 July 1967

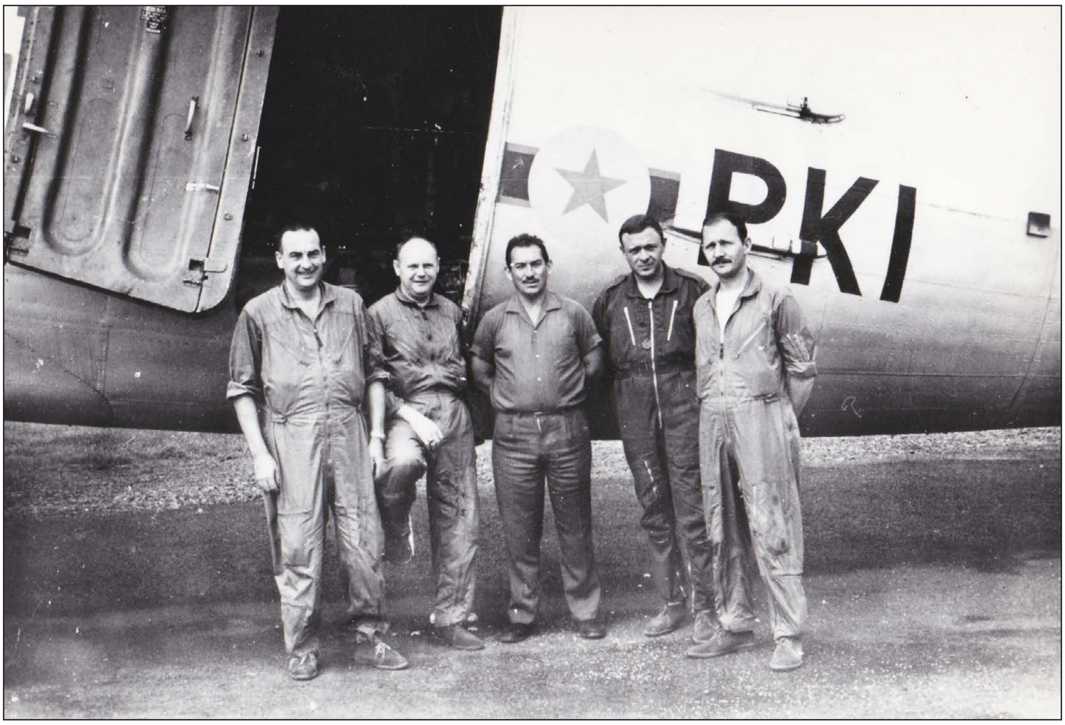
The crew was awakened by the sound of gun fire but the firefight was short-lived. The 3rd Company of 10 Commando based in Walikale and led by Raymond Noël, took control of the Saïo military camp occupied by the ANC. The commune of Ibanda was also under control and Noël was due to be joined by 400 Congolese and mercenary troops commanded by Bob Noddyn. The ANC had withdrawn into the mountains and controlled the road leading to Rwanda via the bridge over the Ruzizi.

Friday, 7 July 1967

Schramme has reported by radio that he is encountering problems in Kisangani. This has been interpreted by Raymond Noël as a call for help and consequently, he has regrouped his men to act as reinforcements. The FATAC crew, trapped and not having received instructions from Kamina unaware of the situation considered three options: to remain on the spot and run the risk of being considered mercenaries by the ANC; to accompany the mercenaries but entailing an even greater risk or to try to reach Rwanda *via* the lake or the road.

The men of the FATAC, November 1966 to January 1967. (Author's collection)

HIRONDELLE
3907
Troops of Schramme's 10 Commando make their way into Kisangani in July 1967. (Author's collection)



9T-PKI was one of the FATAC's C-47s that was caught up in the mercenary revolt of July 1967. Pictured here are its crew from left to right, Bruneel, Delmarcelle, unknown, Deferme and Van den Broeck at Bukavu in 1967. (Author's collection)

took the initiative to call the operations section of 15 Wing in Melsbroek. Here, staff were happy to learn that the crew was unharmed and immediately started to organise their repatriation. From then, things moved quickly. On the evening of 15 July, the survivors of the Bukavu incident, boarded a Sabena DC-10 for Brussels.

A Return to Belgium via Angola

The following report was compiled by members of the FATAC who lived through the events in Kisangani between 5 and 19 July 1967. Two copies were presented to the Belgian Ministry of Defence, one to the chief of the Belgian Air Force and another to Belgian military intelligence. Most of the report was compiled using the diary of navigator, Theofiel Naets.

A Narrow Escape from Bukavu

The third and most logical option being chosen and with no boats available, the FATAC crew was forced to travel by road to escape the fighting in Bukavu. The departure fixed for 1300hrs, the crew took their places in a pickup truck driven by its usual driver, the mercenary known only as 'Freddy'. The vehicle travelled at high speed along the road to Ruzizi.

As they were making their way into Rwanda and before the crew reached a bridge that would take them to safety in Ruzizi, the men encountered an ANC guard post. At first, there was no reaction from the guards but within a few seconds, the FATAC crew had come under heavy fire. Though nobody was hit, despite the vehicle's momentum and weight, a chain across the entrance to the bridge stopped the truck in its tracks. The men had no choice but to unload their baggage, abandon the vehicle and run as fast as they could, under fire from the ANC, across the bridge.

Once they had reached Cyangugu, Rwanda, on the other side of the bridge, the men breathed a sigh of relief. However, the Rwandan soldiers guarding their entrance to the bridge were less welcoming and even stated that they wanted to send the Belgian fugitives back to the Congo. Possibly under the impression that the Belgians were mercenaries, it was only after they had produced their identity cards and asserted their status as Belgian soldiers providing technical assistance, that the difficulties were ironed out. The crew then went to Kamembe airfield to await instructions from BAKA.

A radio call was answered by a Congolese telling the men to go back to base and calls for these instructions to be confirmed by a Belgian officer, went unanswered. Suspicions raised, the crew preferred to remain in Kamembe under the protection of the Rwandan authorities. Next came a journey to Kigali, the Rwandan capital on the night of 7–8 July. The crew were accompanied by a Belgian official and the men stayed with a friend of Depaire who bought them civilian clothing. Every day from 8–15 July, Roekhaut and Meylemans went to the Belgian embassy to obtain news of what they should do next. Still not receiving instructions, Meylemans

Kisangani, Wednesday, 5 July

The first mission for 9T-PKC was to head to Ingi. Take-off was scheduled for 08:00 and at the same time 9T-PKF, which had finished its stay in Kisangani, was scheduled to take off for Kamina. Around 06:15 however, a gunfight broke out and the street in front of the hotel was swept by machine gun fire. A few meters down the road, a jeep lay on its side with bodies lying on the ground. It was out of the question to go to the airfield to accomplish the mission and only the two flight engineers took the risk of travelling. Once there and under fire from the ANC, they evacuated a seriously wounded man to the hospital along with another who had succumbed to his injuries.

Around 10:00 hours, mercenaries from 6 Commando brought weapons to the hotel. The situation was embarrassing because the status of the Belgian soldiers obliged them to maintain strict neutrality in the matter. The two flight engineers returned to the hotel at around 12:00 after coming under fire from the ANC and they confirmed that the airfield had been taken by mercenary troops. Around 16:00, more mercenaries arrived at the hotel and forced the Cuban pilot of a T-28 to return to his aircraft and to strafe ANC soldiers organising an attack on Camp Ketele. Before they could carry this out, Schramme however, decided to evacuate the camp and join Denard at Simi-Simi Airfield.

As the situation of the Belgian soldiers at the Hôtel des Chutes became more precarious, some of them started to lose their nerve and they decided to seek refuge with 6 Commando mercenaries near the hospital and midway between the town and the airfield. Here, Major Hallyn, Senior Captain Naets and Captain Lenglez held a meeting with Denard to find a way of helping the FATAC crews escape but this request was refused by the Belgians who then moved to the much better located Congo Palace. The manager, Mr. Foucques, who did not want soldiers in his establishment, temporarily set them up in the corridors and, finally, around midnight, his wife made three rooms available to house the 16 men of the detachment.

Thursday, 6 July
A second day of anguish began from 06:00 hours when the crackling of automatic weapons and the explosions of mortar bombs could be heard. Other noises come from journalists who are complaining about the presence of Belgian military forces at the hotel and the danger they represent to their independence and security.

While this was taking place, Denard appeared at the hotel with a bandaged head after being wounded the day before near the port in Kisangani. After answering questions from journalists, Denard then ordered the two crews of the C-47s to go to the airfield. Under threat, they were then forced to fly to Bondo to bring back reinforcements to Kisangani. To ensure that they carried out the mission correctly, the navigators, radio operators and technicians were guarded at gunpoint. The two FATAC aircraft, preceded by two C-47s operated by Air Congo, took off at around 11:00 hours. There was a slight problem when the landing gear of 9T-PKF was lowered and the red lights came on indicating that the landing gear was not locked. However, its pilot, Verbeeck, landed safely in Bondo. To save time and especially to maintain the hydraulic pressure on the landing gear, the engines of the aircraft were not shut down.

The mercenaries took control of the radio station at the airfield which led to a heated discussion with the ANC soldiers but Edmond De Rauw managed to calm things down. 9T-PKC took off at 13:15 hours and returned directly to Kisangani. 9T-PKF was sent to Buta and Banalia on its return flight but at Banalia the aircraft was fired upon by ANC soldiers as it circled the plain. As a result, the course was set for Kisangani.

At some point during the flight to Kisangani, radio operator Beankens was able to escape the attention of his guard to send the following message to BAKA.

"FATAC, FAC and Air Congo aircraft have been forced to carry out missions for the benefit of the mercenaries under armed threat. Unless Kamina intervenes immediately or through diplomatic channels, the survival of the detachment is no longer assured. What are your instructions?"

BAKA acknowledged receipt and, after a few minutes, gave the following laconic reply, "Follow the instructions that have been given to you". Beankens then asked, "Whose instructions?" but BAKA came back with the same response: "Follow the instructions you have been given!"

Back in Kisangani, the FATAC and Cuban crews returned to the hotel after their missions. A guard was set up to protect them and the battle between mercenaries and the ANC raged all night long near the airfield and the hotel where a mortar base had been set up by the mercenaries. To provide cover from ANC fire, the streetlamps that lit up the hotel were put out one by one by Gust Janssens. He proved to be a great shot with a 9mm GP pistol. In other news, we heard that the takeover of Camp Ketele by the ANC had been completed.

Friday, 7 July
Bullets whistled and mortar bombs fell all morning. The mercenaries who were to embark at Banalia arrived by the road to the dam at the River Tshopo. In town, the electricity and water supplies were cut off. The two onboard mechanics, De Rauw and Janssens, went to the airfield and found that the two FATAC planes and the DC-3 9Q-CUL of Air Congo had been damaged during the night. The 9T-PKF was particularly badly damaged and the rudder of the Air Congo aircraft was in tatters. To have a spare aircraft on hand and ready to fly, the mechanics repaired the rudder with a heavy canvas tablecloth found in the terminal, sewing material and some plaster and paint found in the Air Congo store.

Captain Lenglez managed to provide us with food and even managed to find beer in a warehouse. Every day, he left with Jacques Beankens in search of food, all under fire from the ANC. Bob Denard and his Congolese companion, Marie-Elise, were evacuated to Salisbury, Rhodesia, onboard the Air Congo C-47 as well as 15 wounded soldiers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) delegate, Dr. Joaquin Sanz Gadea, was forced to board the plane to treat the injured during the flight and the aircraft took off at 11:00. Its fuel tanks at zero, it was forced to land at Kariba, some 200km north of Salisbury.

Saturday, 8 July
Mortar fire began in the early morning and did not allow for much more sleep. After breakfast, the two flight engineers and two or three other crew members made their way to the airfield bit by bit as the road they took was under fire of the ANC. They saw that 9T-PKF was in a sad state and that it was not repairable, so the aircraft will be 'cannibalised' to keep the other C-47 in flying condition. This aircraft represents our only hope of getting out of this embarrassing situation alive. Morale is incredibly low and nerves are frayed, especially since the ANC must know that we have carried out missions for the benefit of the mercenaries. Several have already exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothes. A source of drinking water was discovered 50 meters from the hotel but to reach it, it was necessary to cross the street under the fire of the ANC. On the way back and having to run, it was discovered that the buckets were half empty.

Mercenaries and anti-government Congolese now fighting side by side, we have been shown a written declaration from Denard informing his comrades-in-arms that he had been evacuated due to his injuries and that he had handed overall command of the operations to Schramme. More positively, the '*popote*' at the Hôtel des Chutes was working as well as it could and sardines and corned beef were being prepared in several ways with Stanor beer laid on to keep up morale. The hotel has become a meeting place for mercenaries and journalists as it is the last place in Kisangani where one can chat over a drink. In the evening, the first floor is transformed into a dormitory because the roof of the hotel has been heavily damaged by mortar bombs and the ceiling of the rooms on the second floor would not withstand further fire. The night has been relatively calm although the fighting continues on the side of the airfield.

Sunday, 9 July
Everyone wakes up early and as water is rationed, use of the toilets and washrooms are reduced to a strict minimum. This morning there has been a race between the hotel and the water source and, from time to time, a burst of machine gun fire crashes against the front of the hotel making us run even faster.

Around noon, the team that had gone to the airfield returned to the hotel. They reported that the left engine of the 9T-PKC had been hit but it could be repaired by the flight engineers. Scaffolding was needed and a cordon of a few mercenaries was posted to protect them from the ANC snipers. One Congolese on the side of the mercenaries was shot in the foot and evacuated to the hospital by the two mechanics.

After removing the engine cover, the mechanics found that the valve covers and the oil pipes that lubricate the valve lifters were damaged beyond repair. Unfortunately, on the 9T-PKF engines, a completely different system is installed and therefore an exchange of parts (with 9T-PKC) was not possible. Thanks to the ingenuity of De Rauw and Janssens a makeshift repair was carried out and with them having worked all day to repair the damage the aircraft has now been moved to a hangar.

Men of the FATAC reached the safety of Angola after arduous days spent as captives of mercenaries in July 1967. (Author's collection)

While Roloux was approaching the end of his guard shift at the entrance to the hotel, around 12:00 hours a mortar bomb landed just five metres away from him. He had just enough time to dive into the corridor and feel the blast pass over but within a few minutes the hotel received five more bombs. One of them hit the branch of a tree at the back of the hotel near the dining room. Naets was in the room with three Cuban pilots, two of whom were seriously injured. These men were rushed to the cellar where they received first aid and we could see that one of the Cubans had been shot in the throat and chest. He was taken to the hospital by another T-28 pilot in a jeep and the two others were evacuated later. The shooting showed that things were really hotting up and it was decided to convert the cellars of the hotel into a dormitory and mess hall. This took us all afternoon. By evening, everything was ready and someone had even found flowers to decorate the tables. Supper was almost joyful as bottles of vodka were found in the cellar.

At about 19:00 hours, two mercenaries came to the hotel and asked for two people to accompany them to the airfield to collect an oxygen tank from one of the planes as the injured Cuban had breathing difficulties. T. Roloux and I volunteered and with our fingers on the trigger, we drove at full speed to the airfield. When we arrived at the hospital with the two cylinders of oxygen, it was realised that the air pressure was insufficient. They headed for the hospital where native Congolese were treated but here the nurse on duty was reluctant to let them in. The sound of a machine gun being fired quickly changed his mind. We took a tank, a regulator and a mask; we can relieve the wounded. Naets decided to spend the night with him to keep him awake by regularly patting his head but two doctors from the Spanish mercenary detachment refused to treat this seriously wounded man. The day was long and despite the mosquitoes and the rats which populate the cellar, we quickly fell asleep.

Monday 10 July

As attacks made by the ANC became increasingly precise and we received telephone threats from the ANC, Schramme ordered us to fly to Punia to look for ammunition. The crew comprising Verbeeck, Lemmens, Roloux, Fernandez and De Rauw, during the previous night the ANC had attempted to retake the airfield but was repulsed. The battle had been so intense that the ground in front of the hangars was littered with shell casings and they had to be swept away before the plane could be taken out. On take-off, a deafening noise resounded and the window on the right side of the cockpit exploded. Had it been hit by a projectile?

The take-off was interrupted while the broken window was replaced by one from 9T-PKF. Unfortunately, without the right tools, the fuel and oil lines were damaged and the flight was called off. Instead, it was the crew of the Air Congo C-47 that was sent to Punia but again the aircraft ran into difficulty when it encountered a violent rainstorm and had to divert to Obokote airfield. Unable to land in Kisangani on the way back because of the storm, the plane headed for Kigali in Rwanda. It never returned to Kisangani.

The heavy rain flooded the cellars of the hotel and the repairs in progress on the 9T-PKC had to be interrupted. After the lull, the mysterious Puren appeared again in a DH-Heron (VP-WAM) which, once it had landed and offloaded its passenger, took off straight away. Puren spoke with Schramme then took the Piper Aztec (9Q-CQJ) from the Vicicongo and left for Angola to find reinforcements.

Tuesday, 11 July

During the night, the ANC launched a powerful attack on the airfield. It was repulsed and around 30 of Mobutu's troops lay dead. The C-47 (9T-PKC) on which all hopes of leaving this hell, was damaged again: an oil tank was punctured and part of the landing gear had to be repaired. While De Rauw was dismantling the tank, an intense gunfire broke out. Surprised by this attack he dropped the tank, which he was able to catch as it fell. Auguste Janssens rescued him and took him to the hospital. The Congolese staff having abandoned the hospital, we had to be content with giving first aid.

On second inspection, we noticed there was even more damage than first thought. The autopilot distribution valve had been sheared off by a bullet and the electrical fuse box was also partially destroyed. The mechanics did not have any diagram or measuring equipment, so they connected the damaged wires by deduction and based on their cross-section and colour. This fixed the problem and all the circuitry was working. On the other hand, the autopilot was not repairable because the hydraulic supply hoses were severed and their ends crushed and bent over to isolate the circuit and prevent possible hydraulic leaks. One of the last concerns of the mechanics was to repair the damaged hose that connects the pump to the fuel tank.

According to Radio-Kinshasa, a US C-130 is ready to fly to Kisangani to evacuate non-combatants. Strips of white sheeting are to be laid out along the runway to indicate to the crew that it is safe to land. This was a trick.

The Tshopo hydroelectric plant was put back in working order thanks to the work of a mechanic-electrician from the detachment who was requisitioned by the mercenaries. Thus, at around 10:30, the radio installations in the control tower were functioning once again.

A call was received from an Air Congo DC-4 that was approaching Isiro. Another call received by the tower appeared to come from another American C-130 which gave an ETA of 14:00 at Kisangani. This aircraft did not appear.

At 17:30, Schramme ordered a T-28 to destroy the fuel tanks in the OTRACO (Office of Colonial Transport) installations on the left bank. Armed with rockets, the T-28 took off shortly before sunset but failed to ignite the tanks. The job was completed with a .50 machine gun from the right bank and soon a huge explosion occurred that lit up the city for part of the evening. Two million litres of oil were set ablaze, releasing such heat that the cranes in the port collapsed.

A little later, Naets received a new oxygen bottle for the injured man provided by *La Maison Hollandaise*. A Spanish doctor told him that he was overly concerned about the condition of the injured Cuban. L. Hallyn was informed of the situation and made an appointment with Schramme to find a way to evacuate the wounded and the FATAC personnel. In the evening, a communiqué from Radio-Kinshasa indicated that any authorisation to land in Kisangani to proceed with the evacuation would be refused. T. Naets then decided to send a message to Kinshasa the next morning on the air traffic control tower's frequency indicating the seriousness of the situation and the need to evacuate the wounded without delay.

Fighting raged continuously throughout the night near the hotel, where the smell of gunpowder spread. The guard was reinforced.

Wednesday, 12 July

L. Hallyn went to Schramme's house as agreed the day before and F. Naets broadcast his appeal over the radio. The message was received by Mbandaka who, in Lingala, relayed it to Kinshasa. Around 09:15, Kinshasa asked for the name and function of F. Naets.

The interview between L. Hallyn and J. Schramme was fruitful. All FATAC members and wounded were allowed to board the 9T-PKC on the condition that they would go to Punia to load more wounded before heading for Portugalia, Angola, the final destination. An armed mercenary would be on board to ensure that orders are carried out. The fuel lines were checked and the last necessary repairs were made before filling the tanks. The fuselage had 45 bullet holes but all the vital elements of the aircraft were working thanks to the continuous work of the two onboard mechanics. At 10:00, the members of the detachment, divided into two groups, headed for the airfield. Only hand luggage could be taken. T. Naets made a last call to Kinshasa who answered that the message sent early in the morning had been passed on to the authorities.

At 11:50, the loading of the wounded on board the 9T-PKC began, followed by the embarkation of the 16 FATAC members, crews and technicians, a Cuban and a Colombian pilot from the FAC, a Spanish doctor and the mercenary in charge of surveillance. The wounded were two members of the FAC, two mercenaries, a Belgian, a Frenchman and eight Katangese. In total 34 people. The aircraft was fully loaded to say the least. Before the engines were started, a final check was made inside the cabin. To no surprise, suitcases were found in the toilets despite orders they should not be taken on board. These were thrown on to the tarmac. At 12:00 hours, the plane lined up on the runway and Verbeeck initiated the take-off of the heavily loaded aircraft. A burst of machine gun fire hit a tank and fuel began to leak. Fortunately, this did not affect the vital functions of the aircraft. The climb rate was only 200 feet per minute because, in addition to the overload, the outside temperature was high. A layer of low stratus soon protected us from ground fire.

The course set for Angola, after the aircraft had stabilised at altitude, Janssens asked the mercenary on duty to leave the cockpit because he had to make a repair. At first the mercenary refused but, in the meantime, De Rauw had removed a part of the voltage regulator and handed it to the mercenary. Given that it was extremely hot, it convinced the mercenary that it was best to leave. Returning to the cargo area, the mercenary was overcome and disarmed. He did not put up much resistance but asked specifically not to be handed over to the authorities in Kinshasa. In any case, this was not the crew's intention.

The route passing through Kananga, it was decided to call the Kamina base where the plane could land if the safety of the crew and passengers could be guaranteed. However, as the call was about to be made and J. Beankens turned on the high frequency transmitter, a large flame appeared, probably caused by electrical cables damaged during the fighting at the airfield.

The aircraft crossed the Angolan border at 16:00 hours and it waited 50 minutes before heading for a military base at Henrique de Carvalho. We had been led to believe that there was a short laterite runway some 800 metres long but in reality, we found that we were due to land at an important Portuguese base with a concrete runway measuring at least 2,500 metres. The authorisation to land was requested by giving a false Belgian registration and while waiting for the answer the plane circled over the airfield. After a few minutes, the control tower asked why we wanted to land and, finally, at 17:00 hours the valiant 9T-PKC was given permission to land. Standing at the end of the runway was a Portuguese officer who turned out to be the base commander. Once more requesting the purpose of our visit, it was explained in full detail by the Spanish-speaking T. Fernandez.

The plane had to be parked on the spot and the occupants were confined on board until nightfall. In the meantime, fresh water was given to the injured. The aircraft was then pushed into a hangar where its Congolese markings on the fuselage were later removed. 9T-PKC would later carry out a mission to Bukavu with a load of ammunition. As for the men, rooms and meals were offered to all the personnel. A last favour was permission to contact the Belgian embassy in Luanda so that the necessary steps could be taken to reassure the families back home in Belgium.

Thursday 13 and Friday 14 July: Henrique de Carvalho
Each was tactfully questioned by Portuguese State Security. The hospitality of the Portuguese at the base was remarkable and the wounded were transported to Luanda. The welcome provided by the base commander was particularly warm and generous amounts of food and drink were provided. One thing we were asked not to do was to move around the base and to avoid contact with the local population.

Saturday, 15 July: Henrique de Carvalho
In the afternoon, the members of the detachment were asked to be ready for their transfer to Luanda. When asked if the 9T-PKC could be used to carry out the transfer, we pointed out that the aircraft was no longer fit to fly. The transfer was made aboard a Noratlas. The take-off was planned for 22:30 hours but a small technical hitch pushed this back to 01:00.

Sunday, 16 July: Luanda
The Noratlas landed at Luanda at 04:00 and we were greeted by the Belgian consul. He had learnt of our presence in Angola only the day before. Rooms had been reserved at a hotel and a monetary advance was given to each of us. The consul notified the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels of our presence and made the necessary contacts with the Portuguese national airline (TAP) to reserve seats aboard one of its aircraft. It was, however, the holiday period for the Portuguese residents of Angola, so this turned out to be difficult.

Monday, 17 July: Luanda
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels has still not responded. At the end of the afternoon, the consul obtained 10 seats on board the TAP plane which left Luanda in the evening. The next day, four more seats were booked. A list of repatriations including three groups headed each time by an officer was established and entrusted to the consul. Captain R. Lenglez volunteered to leave Luanda last.

Tuesday, 18 July: Luanda
The Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally made itself known. It agreed to a repatriation via the TAP but the repatriated must sign a declaration by which they commit themselves to refund the expenses of voyage if the Belgian authorities did not recognise the justification of the repatriation. It later turned out that the Chief of Staff of the Belgian Air Force had asked foreign affairs to put an end to this pantomime. Thanks to the efforts of the Belgian consul, six members of the detachment were able to board a plane from Lisbon.

Wednesday, 19 July
The last two FATAC soldiers departed Luanda in the evening. On Thursday, 20 July, the repatriation ended when a Sabena flight from Lisbon to Zaventem touched down in the late afternoon.

Saved from the hell of Kisangani – The testimony of Roger Verbeeck:

On Wednesday, 5 July, around 06:00 hours, I suddenly heard machine gun fire. I jumped out of bed to look out the window and saw a jeep with two Congolese being chased and under fire from a series of other military vehicles driven by soldiers wearing green berets.

I dressed hurriedly, went down to the reception and here I saw that our operations officer was already in discussion with a mercenary officer who refused to let us leave the Hôtel des Chutes because the Congolese had revolted. For safety's sake, we needed to arm ourselves. In the meantime, there was more and more commotion in the hotel and the wildest rumours began to circulate. It soon became clear that it was not the Congolese who were revolting but mercenaries and hundreds of former Katanganese soldiers (ex-Baka Regiment) serving with Schramme and Bob Denard. Obviously, we were scared and wondered how it would all end.

Our operations officer had a meeting with Schramme who had requisitioned our two planes (9T-PKC and 9T-PKF). The latter was due to fly to Kamina before noon but Schramme forced me and E. Lemmens to fetch reinforcements from several places in the north and the north-east of Congo. We were threatened with death if we did not carry out these missions. To prevent us from fleeing, only the pilot and the flight engineer were allowed to board. However, on my insistence, a navigator was also allowed to join the flight. The radio operators had to remain in the hotel as hostages.

I received orders to pick up a dozen mercenaries from Bumba, Bondo and Faradje. We tried to contact the Kamina base to obtain more information on what to do next and late in the afternoon after returning to the hotel, we decided to leave the hotel Les Chutes, because it had come under mortar fire during the day. We considered it safer to stay at the Palace Hotel in the centre of the city. At first, the manager refused to let us in because we were armed but we finally managed to persuade him to let us stay. We were given only four rooms and we were quite surprised to find that many journalists and reporters were also staying there. They were overly critical of our role in the Congo.

During the night, there was still a lot of shooting and we had no idea what was going on outside the hotel. We learnt that the mercenaries had the airport and the city more or less under control and that there were casualties among them. However, the road to the airport was not under anyone's control.

The next day, in view of the hostility shown by the journalists, we decided to move back to the hotel Les Chutes. Due to the fact that some rooms on the upper floor had been hit by mortar fire, we moved to the first floor. We put mattresses from the upstairs rooms against the windows for protection. We noted that WIGMO personnel were also staying in the hotel.

The ANC troops had already been trying for two nights to retake the airfield. Thanks to the heroic resistance of a dozen mercenaries, they did not succeed. However, they could not prevent our two Dakotas from being seriously damaged. A mortar shell had hit the crankcase of one of the engines of E. Lemmens' plane (9T-PKF) and the mechanics had declared the aircraft irreparable. Despite the dangerous situation, they managed to get my plane (9T-PKC) back into flying condition within a few days. This was despite a leaking fuel tank, 45 bullet and mortar hits and a hydraulic leak in the autopilot system. All the while, we had to take regular trips along the 'no man's land' between the hotel and the airfield.

The airfield was under the command of a mercenary. He wanted to know if the condition of the airfield would allow planes to take off and land. Together we inspected the runway and found that, despite the mortar attacks, the runway could be used. In the meantime, the Hôtel des Chutes was again under mortar fire. Around noon, a shell exploded in a tree outside a window. Some members of WIGMO were seriously injured. Thanks to the help of our navigator T. Naets, the victims were transported to the hospital in the middle of the attack. A few days later, a huge column of smoke rose from the airfield over Kisangani. We thought that part of the city was on fire but later we were informed that it was a fuel depot on the other side of the river that had been set on fire by the mercenaries.

At the hotel, we lived in abominable circumstances. There was no water or electricity. The only food we had left was a few cans of corned beef and warm beer. To be safe and despite the abundant presence of rats, mosquitoes and other bugs, we moved to the basement with our mattresses. We took turns standing guard at the hotel entrance, day and night. There were rumours that ANC soldiers in civilian clothes were spreading panic in the city and that Schramme and his mercenaries were considering leaving Kisangani in the face of enormous pressure from thousands of Congolese soldiers. We were worried about what the future held.

In case the situation worsened to the point that we could no longer reach the airfield; we were determined not to surrender to the Congolese but to leave the city with Schramme and his mercenaries. On Saturday, 15 July, Schramme came to the airfield and learnt that our plane had been repaired. He gave us the order to transport the wounded mercenaries to Punia and allowed us to take on board our Belgian colleagues, as long as there was room.

Some of the crew members hurried to take our men from the hotel to the airfield but I, myself, stayed on board to find out the number of wounded and their situation. There were only five wounded mercenaries and a few members of WIGMO. Secretly, I had arranged with my navigator T. Naets not to go to Punia but to head for Angola and more specifically the small town of Portugalia. It was situated just across the border and was still under Portuguese administration. Schramme must have had his suspicions because he brought a mercenary on board. At about 14:00 hours, Etienne and I tried to take off with our 'Charlies' in a very bad state. Etienne was sitting next to me while our mechanic De Rauw was between us to watch over the instruments. After a few hundred metres, the window on the right side of the cockpit shattered but finally we managed to take off.

Immediately, I felt that the plane was overloaded: not only had we taken on too much fuel but we also had too many passengers on board. As we flew over the river at a height of a few hundred metres, I had the impression that we were under fire but apparently no damage was done. In the meantime, Naets had managed to convince the mercenary that we should head for Angola instead of Punia. In order to escape possible attacks from Mobutu's planes, I decided to fly just below the clouds. Unfortunately, the cloud layer disappeared after an hour's flying.

During the flight we encountered a lot of problems: one of the four fuel tanks had been perforated by a bullet and it was impossible for us to have an exact idea of the amount of fuel it contained. In addition, our high frequency radio was damaged by a bullet and the autopilot was not working anymore because of the hydraulic leakage which could not be completely repaired.

After a few hours flying, we knew that we would easily reach Portugalia and we wondered if it would not be better to fly for an hour longer to get further away from the Congolese border. Our navigator found what we thought was a small airfield in his documentation and we decided to head for Henrique de Carvalho. According to the documents, it had an 800-metre runway and no other facilities but nonetheless I decided it would be a good place to land.

After some time and to our great surprise, a huge airfield came in sight. After much difficulty, we managed to contact the control tower but we were denied permission to land. I reported that we had serious injuries on board and decided to land on what looked like a military base. Immediately after landing, I was ordered to stay on the runway. The commander of the base arrived by car to check our load.

A Portuguese colonel immediately ordered the medical staff of the base to evacuate the wounded and to bring a bus to transport the other passengers. In order to avoid possible problems with his own staff, he ordered me to stay on the runway until nightfall. When it was completely dark, I steered our 'Charly' to the hangar with the help of our two mechanics. Back in the hangar, the inscription *'Force Aérienne Congolaise'* was immediately painted over by the Portuguese.

As for the wounded, they were given first aid in a nearby hospital and then transported to Luanda. My crew and I were secluded in one of the dining rooms of the base and interrogated by the Portuguese and Interpol. After a few days, our request to contact the Belgian consulate in Luanda was granted and the consul promised to do everything possible to evacuate us to Belgium via Lisbon as soon as possible. There was no question that we could be evacuated aboard a DC-6 from 15 Wing as none of their four aircrafts were available.

On 16 July, a Noratlas of the Portuguese air force took us to Luanda. Thanks to the intervention of the consul, we were accommodated in one of the best hotels in the city. The next day, the consul informed us that our evacuation would take time as only a few people could board each available flight. It was the holiday season for the Portuguese and all TAP flights to Lisbon were full.

Next, we had to decide who would go first. Everyone agreed that it would be Commander Hallyn and, every day, one of us went to the airport to see if there were any seats available. More than once, they came back to the hotel empty-handed. After eight days, I was able to leave on a TAP B-707 for Lisbon. On arrival, I was taken to a luxury hotel where, because of my khaki shorts, I was not allowed in the restaurant. Fortunately, the next day I was able to fly to Brussels on a TAP Caravelle. At Zaventem, I was awaited by my wife and also by the Belgian police who forbade me from having any contact with journalists.

Despite the fact that we found ourselves in Kisangani in extremely dangerous situations, everything ended well thanks to the courageous and even sometimes heroic behaviour of our 16 crew members. I am thinking in particular of our two mechanics Edmond De Rauw and Auguste Janssens who managed, without any help or intervention from outside, to keep our 'Charly' flying. Without them, it could have ended very differently. My personal thanks go also to the manufacturer Douglas Aircraft Company to whom I express my admiration for the fantastic Dakota DC-3/C-47 that brought us out of this adventure alive.

Unfortunately, my praises do not extend to 15 Wing. Our wives were misinformed by Melsbroek, both about our extremely dangerous situation in Kisangani and about our safe arrival in Angola. Later, I learnt by chance that Mobutu had asked Belgium

> to extradite us and our plane and I find it really scandalous that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the time, Pierre Harmel, did not react to this request. It is thanks to the categorical refusal of Portugal to extradite that this demand was refused. Finally, I have always wondered why no one, not even my leaders at 15 Wing ever asked me about these events. *Honni soit qui mal y pense*.

Schramme's Column Heads for Bukavu

Once the wounded and the FATAC had left Kisangani, Schramme also decided it was time to leave. His mercenaries had been arrested, transferred to Kinshasa and this was the last time they were ever seen. Others were massacred in Kindu by the ANC. For those who survived, Schramme ordered them to head back to his plantation at Yumbi, before making their way to Bukavu on the border with Rwanda.

According to Schramme, his column consisted of 120 vehicles and 2,500 people, including 350 white civilians, 600 black women and as many children, mercenaries and Katangese mutineers from the ANC. Clearly, the ANC was not going to let Schramme escape and fights took place along the way with Schramme inflicting a significant defeat on the ANC at Itebero. The ANC left substantial amounts of vehicles and equipment behind as they fled and this war booty enabled Schramme to reach Bukavu on 7 August 1967.

A New Government in Bukavu

On August 9, all the civilians and wounded from the Schramme column were evacuated to Rwanda. Then, on 10 August, a 'Government of Public Salvation' was set up in Bukavu under the leadership of Colonel Léonard Monga, one of the Katangese commanders who was born in Bukavu. At that moment, Schramme's army was still composed of 120 whites and 1,000 blacks. He decided to retreat to Bukavu while waiting for Denard, then to invade the Congo from the south with an army that was yet to be created.

One day, the Vicicongo Piper (9Q-CQJ) appeared in the skies over Bukavu and landed on a clearing prepared by Schramme's remaining troops. It was piloted by Roger Bracco, a Belgian pilot formerly of the FAK and Jeremiah Puren, the South African. With them, they carried the plans for the conquest of the Congo. With Bracco finding the landing strip too difficult to land on, he headed for Lake Kivu. It was towards the bottom of this lake where these plans sank. Bracco and Puren were the only things saved from the aircraft.

Schramme Leaves the Congo

In order to make it possible to land an ex-FATAC aircraft coming from Angola and loaded with three tons of ammunition, Schramme had a 600-metre-long airstrip built on the Bukavu golf course. Here, the return was awaited of 9T-PKC which transported the FATAC members to safety in Angola. At the controls of the aircraft were Léon Libert, a former WIGMO employee and Jean-Pierre Van den Berghe.

When Libert realised the runway was 150 metres too short, he decided not to lower the landing gear and instead, opted to land the aircraft on its belly. The aircraft being badly damaged during this manoeuvre, the ammunition was able to be unloaded but it was the end for 9T-PKC. As for Schramme, he now found himself saddled with two pilots but no aircraft. One more aircraft paid a visit to Schramme to deliver supplies and a DC-4 operated by the Southern Rhodesian Africa Air (VP-YRY) carried out a free drop on 11 September 1967.

During the night of 28–29 October, the ANC launched its final assault in an attempt to put down the mercenary rebellion. On 30 October and 1 November, Denard made two attempts from Angola to draw the ANC's attention away from Schramme's forces, however both attempts ended in failure. Schramme's situation in Bukavu therefore became untenable. Once the last of his ammunition had been used up, Schramme decided to evacuate to Rwanda under the protection of the International Committee of the Red Cross. The Africans among Schramme's troops were provided asylum in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and the white mercenaries were evacuated to Malta. The survivors crossed the border into Rwanda on the night of 4–5 November. The siege of Bukavu had cost the lives of 80 Katangese and 20 mercenaries but the ANC did not dare enter the city of Bukavu until November 8. Thus ended the period of mercenaries in the service of the Congolese state.

Evacuation of the FATAC from Kamina

The testimony of Claude Buisseret, acting commander of the FATAC detachment:

> During Bill Ongena's two-week leave, I lodged at his villa in Lumwe next to BAKA. Lieutenant Colonel Pibwe of the ANC and 800 of his commandos were guarding the base. As he had been trained in the United States and spoke English well, fortunately we were able to understand each other without any problems.
>
> One day, he came to me and asked me kindly to give him the key to the lock of a shed that was used as a weapons cache that included rifles, pistols, rockets and boxes of Mills grenades. After saying bluntly, "Give me the key or we will blow the door open", I handed over the key. I did so in light of a previous meeting during which the question of confidence had been discussed, so I asked him what we were to do if attacked. As the specialist NCOs at the base had little to no experience with weapons, the answer was that there would only be four officers plus the medical officer Ghislain Linchet and the Chief Warrant Officer Pierre Vermoesen of the operations section to defend the base – with weapons we no longer had.
>
> After emptying our weapons store, Pibwe told me that the whole detachment would be evacuated by train the next day at 14:00 from the Kamina-Ville station and that it would travel to Kananga. The evacuation took place because Mobutu feared that BAKA and its C-47s would fall into the hands of the mercenaries. Any resistance to the order was useless as Pibwe and his commandos would make mincemeat of the detachment if ordered to do so, or if we resisted.
>
> At 14:00, just over 50 officers and men of the FATAC waited on the platform of the station as ordered. Still waiting to board the train at 16:00, the reason for the delay was that Mobutu's representative had yet to arrive. When he did, flanked by two bodyguards, we could see that he was drunk as he was swaying from side to side. He took a pistol from his jacket and putting the barrel straight between my eyes he told me, "You are the commander of this detachment and your men call me a dirty macaque". I was not afraid to die as my father had told me that the only certainty in life was death. We stared at each other for a few seconds and, unblinkingly, I said to him, "Commissioner, I don't think so. The mechanics of the Belgian Air Force are well behaved and would not allow themselves to call you a macaque (even if they think so … but I didn't tell him that) and personally, it's the very first time I've met you". I thought to myself that if his finger was on the trigger and he has taken off the safety, this could

get very messy. I slowly raised my left-hand, put it on the barrel and as I lowered his gun, I said with a smile, "You never know, Commissioner, the gun might go off. His only reaction was to tell Pibwe that we could get on the train".

The train journey was exceptionally long, quite uncomfortable and there was no food. At every stop or when the train slowed down, blacks would show up at the windows laughing or yelling that we were going to get our throats cut. Some old mechanics, at the end of their career who had come to the Congo to make some extra money, were crying so the doctor and I had to console them. Fortunately, I had a small battery-operated record player with a few 45s, which changed the atmosphere. We were put together in two cars and each had a small platform at each end with an armed soldier acting as guard. If things went badly and blacks came aboard to beat us up, we agreed that the UDéf officers of 2 Wing would take one sentry to get his gun and the medic and I would take the other. Fortunately, we didn't have to.

Upon arrival in Kananga, an English-speaking, US-trained Congolese major was waiting for us with a Volkswagen minibus and two covered trucks to take us to the cadet training school. The commandant of the school was a Major General who spoke neither English nor French. It took an hour of talking through an interpreter to convince him that we were not mercenaries and had nothing to do with the mutiny. Thanks to the interpreter (a major), everything went well. Although we had to sleep on metal beds without mattresses, we had food so there was no problem.

In the early morning, we were awakened by singing that was getting louder and louder. Outside, there was an extensive line of about 3,000 women brandishing long wooden spoons making its way towards the school. "They are singing a peace song", the major explained. However, he added that if they were let into the school, they would tear us apart and eat us until there was nothing left. Being the good soldier, he placed sections outside the school armed with machine guns. When the procession was about 500 metres away, he ordered his soldiers to fire off a burst of fire. Luckily for us, this stopped the demonstrators dead in their tracks and they turned around.

We left the school in a convoy and headed for the airfield at Kananga. It was pelted with projectiles without causing any real damage and waiting for us was a C-46 Curtiss Commando crewed by Cubans who were getting ready to transport us to N'Djili. When we arrived, we saw three American C-130s guarded by armed Marines on the tarmac to our left. Paratroopers from Mobutu's Praetorian Guard were everywhere with machine guns slung over their shoulders and looking around I could see a US military attaché I knew. As I refused to get on the bus that was to collect us, I waved to the attaché in a call for help. He replied that there was nothing he could do for me and an ANC soldier then tried to force me on to the bus. Again, I refused but this time I was surrounded by paratroopers who cocked their weapons. Thinking the worst was about to happen, I took my place on the bus. After I had received a kick in the kidneys from one of the paratroopers, the bus set off for the pier to Brazzaville to catch a flight to Paris-Orly.

At Orly, the detachment boarded a plane of the 15 Wing to Melsbroek where it was received by Mr. Yvan Roggen, the deputy to Minister of National Defence who apologised for not being present. The next day, summoned to the Cabinet, I was asked to write a report of the events. After writing it, I could finally look forward to a two-week leave. My African adventure was over and I remember it fondly.

The testimony of Pierre Vermoesen (operations officer):

> Upon arrival at N'Djili, my colleagues were put immediately on the river shuttle to Brazzaville from where they would be repatriated to Belgium. Having left my passport in Kamina, I could not accompany them so I was quarantined in a hotel somewhere near the river. I was locked up with a Frenchman who had married in Kamina and did not want to be repatriated. On the fifth day, Bill Ongena turned up at the door. He had obtained a new passport through the embassy and I was taken to Brazzaville from where I took a direct flight to Brussels. When I arrived at Zaventem, General Du Monceau de Bergendal was waiting for me. He had the following message, "You shut your mouth to everyone and especially to the media".

Epilogue

Half a century has passed since the founding of FATAC and in the meantime, most of the protagonists have passed away while those who remain, are mostly in their eighties. Memories have become blurred by time and some have probably been exaggerated. However, this process also has its good side. As time passes, we have a broader view of past events and when previously unknown facts become known, we discover relationships that we could not understand before. Those who once left with a certain resentment because they were forced to and did not know what awaited them, have become more forgiving over the years. They have indeed had an adventure from which they have returned unscathed and this adventure gave them an experience that they could not have gained in any other way.

Those who left full of youthful enthusiasm, never complained about it. The events they experienced and participated in were an invaluable learning experience for them. But all this does not prevent us from asking ourselves whether it was really worth it.

It is a fact that hundreds, if not thousands, of Congolese hostages and civilians owe their lives to Operations Ommegang, Dragon Rouge and Dragon Noir, as well as the various mercenary formations that we cannot forget. FATAC personnel played a vital role in all of this. Without the commitment of the H-21s, C-47s and the UDéf, these rescue operations would not have been possible. For that reason alone, it was well worth the effort.

The ambiguous attitude of the Belgian government is easy to explain because it is very delicate for the ex-coloniser to intervene in the internal affairs of the former colony. In this respect, our country already had a bad reputation following the Belgian intervention of July 1960 and its role during the Katangese secession. Nonetheless, it is also clear that our government could not abandon to their fate, the many compatriots who were there facing danger of death.

But what use was FATAC once the rescue operations were over? In Kinshasa, Mobutu had taken power and continued his ruthless course. At the end, in the last few months, FATAC's planes were only used to supply mercenaries scattered throughout the Congo. FATAC had become a plaything between the quarrels and confrontations of the new regime with the mercenaries. The dictator emerged victorious from this struggle and remained in power for decades until he too, was replaced by a new dictator, Laurent-Désiré Kabila. For decades, he had fomented sedition in the mountains of eastern Congo, a territory that had never been fully pacified.

Appendix

Alphabetical list of FATAC personnel

This list is incomplete as it has not been possible to find the names of all military personnel who served in the FATAC.

Surname	First Name	Role
Abts	Johnny	Operations officer, pilot
Aelpaerts	Louis	Onboard mechanic
Aerts	Freddy	Technical officer
Aerts	François	Operations officer, pilot
Albert	Marcel	Mechanical specialist
Allaeys	Frans	Pilot
Appermans	Jozef	Pilot
Austenne	Robert	Operations officer, pilot
Asscherinckx	?	Mechanical specialist
Baccaert	Raymond	Pilot
Bachelet	René	Pilot
Bahren	?	Mechanical specialist
Bal	Théo	Pilot
Bailleux	Jean	UDéf
Baise	Willy	Onboard radio operator
Bara	Jules	Radio technician
Barbaix	?	Mechanical specialist
Barréa	?	UDéf
Bauer	?	Radio technician
Bandoul	Désiré	Pilot
Baudry	Jean	Navigator
Beankens	Jacques	Onboard radio operator
Beaufort	?	Mechanical specialist
Beaujean	?	Mechanical specialist
Beauprez	?	Mechanical specialist
Bergmans	Léon	Onboard radio operator
Bernard	?	Onboard radio operator
Beydts	Henri	Onboard radio operator
Berton	Pierre	UDéf
Berth	Achiel	Pilot
Bertrand	Henri	UDéf
Blanckaert	Adolf	Mechanical specialist
Bleus	François	Mechanical specialist
Blomme	Roland	Onboard radio operator
Blume	Alain	Pilot, Detachment 2IC
Bosmans	Viktor	Mechanical specialist
Bossaert	Victor	Mechanical specialist
Bordon	Raymond	Onboard mechanic
Bouchat	Théo	Mechanical specialist

Surname	**First Name**	**Role**
Boutet	Edouard	Pilot
Bovy	Théo	Mechanical specialist
Briers	Paul	Telecommunications specialist
Brisaert	Alfred	Onboard mechanic
Broeks	Gustaaf	Telecommunications specialist
Brokken	Edgard	Pilot
Bruneel	Michel	Pilot
Brutout	?	Mechanicsal specialist
Bouzin	Eric	Pilot
Buisseret	Claude	Pilot, 2IC Detachment
Bussche	Roland	Mechanical specialist
Bulteel	Roger	Mechanical specialist
Buyse	Robert	Pilot
Cailleau	Gustaaf	Pilot, 2IC Detachment
Carlier	Marc	UDéf
Carpels	Firmin	Navigator
Carpels	Lucien	Pilot
Cauwelier	Hendrik	Mechanical specialist
Ceuleers	Robert	Onboard radio operator
Chatelain	Emile	Pilot
Chavez	Raymond	Onboard radio operator
Christiaen	Gabriël	Pilot
Chistiaens	André	Mechanic
Claes	Michel	Medical officer
Claessens	?	Mechanical specialist
Claude	Robert	Onboard radio operator
Clesse	Léon	Navigator
Cloots	Willy	Mechanical specialist
Colson	Camille	UDéf
Collier	?	Mechanical specialist
Comeyne	Jacques	Mechanical specialist
Coinne	Jacques	Mechanical specialist
Coghen	José	Air traffic controller
Coorrevits	Marc	Mechanical specialist
Cornez	Marc	Mechanical specialist
Cortens	Jean-Claude	Onboard mechanic
Corthut	A.	Mechanical specialist
Coucke	P.	Pilot
Cowez	Alfons	Pilot
Coyette	Jean-Marie	Operations officer, pilot
Cromboom	Jean-Marie	Navigator
Cruysmans	Bernard	Pilot
Daniels	?	Mechanical specialist
Daeninck	Hector	Onboard radio operator
Daneelse	?	Mechanical specialist
David	?	Mechanical specialist

Surname	**First Name**	**Role**
Debaerdemaeker	?	Mechanical specialist
Debusschere	Théophile	Mechanical specialist
Decamps	?	Mechanical specialist
De Campenaere	Herman	Mechanical specialist
De Ceuster	Robert	Mechanical specialist
Deceuster	?	Mechanical specialist
Deceulaer	?	Mechanical specialist
Dechambre	José	Onboard mechanic
Declerck	Frans	Onboard mechanic
De Cloe	Jozef	Navigator
Decock	André	Pilot, 2IC Detachment
Decoq	?	Air controller
Deconinck	Laurent	UDéf
Decorte	Pepijn	Onboard radio operator
Decoster	?	Onboard mechanic
Dedoncker	J.	Mechanical specialist
Defays	Raymond	Onboard radio operator
Deferme	Marcel	Navigator
Degeest	?	Onboard mechanic
De Geyter	Paul	Pilot
Degrauwe	Léo	Onboard mechanic
Degroof	?	Mechanical specialist
Degueldre	?	Mechanical specialist
De Guetre	Roger	Mechanical specialist
Dehaene	Yvan	Pilot
Dhynes	Léon	Pilot
Delandtsheer	?	Pilot
Delhaye	Jean	Mechanical specialist
Delleuse	Marcel	Onboard mechanic
Delaunoy	Alfred	UDéf
De Liedekerke	Yvan	Pilot
Delmarcelle	Raymond	Onboard radio operator
Delmotte	Raymond	Mechanical specialist
Demeyer	Gustaaf	Pilot
Demayer	Charles	Onboard mechanic
Demeyer	Carlos	UDéf
Demey	Jean-Claude	Pilot
Demiddelaer	Francis	Onboard radio operator
Deneef	Gilbert	Onboard radio operator
Denève	Edmond	Mechanical specialist
Denis	?	Armourer
Depaire	Guy	Onboard radio operator
Depaeuw	Guy	Technicians Officer
De Rauw	Edmond	Onboard mechanic
Derynck	Willy	Mechanical specialist
Deroeck	Eddy	Onboard radio operator

Surname	First Name	Role
Desmedt	Alphonse	Pilot
Destroyer	A.	UDéf
Desutter	Charles	Mechanical specialist
De Temmerman	Michel	Pilot
Devillers	André	Administration
Devisscher	Antoine	Pilot
Devos	Jacques	Pilot
De Weerdt	?	UDéf
Dewuffel	N.	Mechanical specialist
Dewulf	Adolf	Mechanical specialist
D'Haene	Adolf	Pilot
Dierick	René	Mechanical specialist
Dimkoff	?	Mechanical specialist
Dobbelaere	Robert	Mechanical specialist
Docquir	Robert	Pilot
Donckers	Germain	Cook
Driane	Didier	Supplies
Drooghe	Didier	Mechanical specialist
Dubray	René	Mechanical specialist
Dumont	Jean-Marie	Mechanical specialist
Dupont	Lucien	Navigator
Duquesne	Roland	UDéf
Duquennois	Georges	Telecommunications specialist
Duquet	Albert	Pilot
Duray	?	Mechanical specialist
Dussart	?	Mechanical specialist
Dutordoit	Charles	Onboard radio operator
Elias	Robert	Mechanical specialist
Engels	Nicolas	Mechanic
Everaerts	Alex	Pilot
Fauville	Roger	UDéf
Feuillen	Robert	Onboard radio operator
Fernandez	José-Antonio	Onboard radio operator
Fleurinck	Louis	Onboard mechanic
Flon	André	Mechanical specialist
Fonck	Adolf	Pilot
Foucart	Léon	Onboard mechanic
Fraipont	Jacques	Onboard radio operator
François	Gérard	Mechanics specialist
François	Michel	Navigator
Frérotte	André	Mechanical specialist
Gahide	Ivon	UDéf
Garroi	Edouard	Onboard radio operator
Geens	Lodewijk	Pilot
Geeraerts	Maurice	Onboard mechanic
Geers	Ghislain	Onboard mechanic

Surname	First Name	Role
Géruzet	Michel	Pilot
Geyskens	Maurice	Mechanical specialist
Gildis	Robert	Mechanical specialist
Gillis	Eugène	Mechanical specialist
Gilson	Franz	Onboard radio operator
Girardin	Max	Pilot
Glazemakers	André	Mechanical specialist
Goorts	Georges	Navigator
Grégoire	Alain	UDéf
Grietens	François	Mechanical specialist
Grulois	?	Mechanical specialist
Guiot	?	Telecommunications officer
Gyckiere	Raymond	Onboard mechanic
Hadermann	Léon	Pilot
Haerinck	Germain	Mechanical specialist
Halleux	Philippe	Pilot
Hallyn	Laurent	Navigator
Hanot	Léonard	Pilot
Harze	Albert	Mechanical specialist
Hemeryck	?	Mechanical specialist
Hendrickx	?	Mechanical specialist
Henry	Jean	UDéf
Henry	Roland	Mechanical specialist
Heptia	Gaspard	Pilot
Hermans	?	Electrical specialist
Hermans	A.	Onboard mechanic
Heusequin	Oscar	Onboard mechanic
Hiernaux	Frans	Mechanical specialist
Hilgers	?	Mechanical specialist
Hoes	Franciscus	Pilot
Hollanders	Fernand	UDéf
Honnay	Emile	Pilot
Hoornaert	Christian	UDéf
Hoogewys	Jaen	Radio links specialist
Huaux	Georges	Mechanical specialist
Huez	Marius	Administration
Hubin	Paul	Pilot
Huggenberger	Freddy	Navigator
Ickmans	André	Onboard radio operator
Imbrechts	Jean-Baptiste	Mechanic
Jacquart	Roger	Onboard mechanic
Jacquemain	?	Mechanical specialist
Jacquemart	Jean-Marie	Officer technician
Jacobs	Robert	Pilot
Jans	?	Air controller
Janssens	August	Onboard mechanic

Surname	**First Name**	**Role**
Janssens	Emile	Onboard mechanic
Jeanmotte	Omer	Mechanical specialist
Jonckheer	Arthur	Onboard radio operator
Jonckheerer	?	Mechanical specialist
Karlowski	Peter	Pilot
Keirse	Ruffin	Onboard mechanic
Kennis	Luc	Pilot, operations officer
Kerckx	K.	Onboard radio operator
Klingeleers	Théophile	Mechanical specialist
Kuyl	Paul	Pilot
Lacroix	?	Administration officer
Lambert	Christian	Pilot
Lambert	Paul	Mechanical specialist
Lams	Roger	Pilot, operations officer
Lankmans	?	Mechanical specialist
Laurent	Willy	Pilot
Laureys	?	Supplies
Lebeau	Jacques	Pilot
Leboutte	André	Navigator
Lechat	Gilbert	Pilot
Ledocq	?	Supplies
Leemans	Claude	UDéf
Leherte	?	Administration
Lehousse	Frans	Mechanical specialist
Lembourg	Marcel	Pilot
Lemmens	Etienne	Pilot
Lenglez	René	Air traffic controller
Lenoir	Léon	Onboard mechanic
Leysen	Alfons	Navigator
Libaers	Maurice	UDéf
Libeer	Pol	Navigator, operations officer
Liebaut	?	Mechanical specialist
Linchet	Ghislain	Medical officer
Lodewijck	?	Onboard mechanic
Lootens	Robert	Navigator
Lorge	?	Mechanical specialist
Loriaux	Alphonse	Mechanical specialist
Louis	Norbert	Mechanical specialist
Loveniers	?	Mechanical specialist
Lowagie	Roger	Onboard mechanic
Maes	Bernard	Pilot
Maes	Eugeen	Mechanical specialist
Maes	?	Mechanical specialist
Maiscoq	?	Nurse
Malfait	Pieter	Pilot
Malmedy	Julien	Pilot

Surname	First Name	Role
Maquet	René	Navigator
Marannes	?	Air traffic controller
Marcq	?	Mechanical specialist
Marinus	Charles	Navigator
Marmignon	?	Mechanical specialist
Martens	?	Mechanical specialist
Mary	Paul	Radio links specialist
Matheuwezen	Jules	Mechanical specialist
Mathieu	?	Mechanical specialist
Matterne	Charles	Pilot
Matthys	?	Supplies
Melotte	?	Pilot, operations officer
Mennes	Ludovic	Pilot
Mertens	?	Telecommunications specialist
Meunier	Robert	Onboard radio operator
Meurisse	Freddy	Maintenance
Meurs	André	Onboard radio operator
Meylemans	René	Navigator
Michel	José	Navigator
Migliavacca	Charles (Tino)	Pilot
Minsart	Roger	Mechanical specialist
Minnaert	André	Mechanical specialist
Moine	?	Mechanical specialist
Moiny	Ernest	Navigator
Mommer	Luc	Pilot
Moreau	Georges	Onboard radio operator
Moreau	Victor	Onboard mechanic
Morleghem	Claude	Onboard radio operator
Mortreux	André	Mechanical specialist
Mottard	Gilbert	UDéf
Mouzon	?	Mechanical specialist
Naets	Theofiel	Navigator
Naesen	Germain	Onboard radio operator
Nelissen	?	?
Neyt	Ludovic	Navigator
Nicolay	Auguste	Mechanical specialist
Nieuwland	?	Air traffic controller
Nijs	Isidoor	Onboard radio operator
Noël	Alain	Pilot
Noël	Emile	Mechanical specialist
Noens	?	Mechanical specialist
Norbert	Louis	?
Olieslagers	Johan	Mechanical specialist
Ongena	William	Pilot, CO Detachment
Palla	Jean-Pierre	Pilot, operations officer
Palmers	?	Electrical specialist

Surname	**First Name**	**Role**
Parmentier	Armand	Navigator
Pattyn	Willy	Navigator
Pauwels	?	Mechanical specialist
Pecher	?	Mechanical specialist
Peeters	Frans	Onboard mechanic
Peeters	Jean	Pilot, operations officer
Peeters	Richard	Mechanical specialist
Perdaen	?	Supplies
Persyn	Hubert	Mechanical specialist
Peyrassol	Charles	Navigator
Picavet	Willy	Navigator
Pyl	R.	Onboard mechanic
Pigeon	Jean	UDéf
Piret	Roger	Onboard mechanic
Pirsoul	Pol	Mechanical specialist
Platteau	Willy	Mechanical specialist
Podevijn	Robert	Pilot
Poedts	Oscar	Onboard mechanic
Poperlier	?	Mechanical specialist
Pootemans	Henri	Navigator
Pourbaix	Léon	Pilot, operations officer
Princen	Marcel	Mechanics specialist
Provost	Marc	Pilot
Quodbach	Jean-Pierre	Pilot, operations officer
Raes	Henry	Pilot, operations officer
Raeven	?	Mechanical specialist
Reip	François	Pilot
Reniers	Jan	Pilot
Renders	Marcel	Onboard mechanic
Restiau	Jacques	Onboard mechanic
Reymen	Maurice	Pilot
Richard	Albert	Pilot
Richard	?	Administration
Richir	André	Pilot
Richir	François	Mechanical specialist
Roeckhaut	Claude	Pilot
Roloux	Théophile	Navigator
Ruelle	Willy	Air traffic controller
Scarsé	Roger	UDéf
Saint Pol	A.	Mechanical specialist
Salteur	?	Pilot
Schellekens	François	Navigator
Schepers	José	Pilot, operations officer
Schollaert	Marcel	Pilot
Schotte	André	Mechanical specialist
Schoukens	?	Supplies

Surname	**First Name**	**Role**
Schuyten	Joseph	Mechanical specialist
Séverin	Ferdinand	Telecommunications officer
Sermon	Hubert	Mechanical specialist
Servais	Auguste	UDéf
Servais	?	Mechanical specialist
Simon	René	Mechanical specialist
Smets	Lodewijk	Mechanical specialist
Smolik	René	Mechanical specialist
Solie	Lucien	Pilot
Soetens	René	General services
Somers	Eduard	Onboard mechanic
Spinette	Louis	Mechanical specialist
Sprémont	André	Mechanical specialist
Stevens	Roger	Onboard radio operator
Stiernon	Philippe	Onboard radio operator
Storme	?	Mechanical specialist
Stroobants	?	Mechanical specialist
Stylman	?	Mechanical specialist
Tasiaux	Marcel	Mechanical specialist
Tayart de Borms	Victor	Navigator
Tenteniers	?	UDéf
Thijs	Herman	Pilot, operations officer
Thiriau	René	Mechanical specialist
Thomas	Bernard	Navigator
Thomé	André	Pilot
Tihon	Jules	?
Tison	Willy	Onboard mechanic
Torreele	Willy	Onboard radio operator
Tourré	Pierre	UDéf
Tricot	Michel	Mechanical specialist
Uytenhove	Pierre	Pilot, CO Detachment
Valtin	?	Supplies
Van Bever	Hubert	Pilot
Van Boxstael	Paul	Pilot
Van Boxstael	André	Onboard radio operator
Van Campenhout	?	Radar specialist
Van Camp	?	Supplies
Van Casteren	Paul	Pilot
Vandaele	Gustaaf	Pilot
Van Daele	Benoni	Onboard mechanic
Van Damme	Raphael	Telecommunications specialist
Vandegaar	Henri	Pilot
Vandekeere	Jacques	Onboard mechanic
Van de Leur	Willy	Parachute specialist
Vandenberghe	Willy	Navigator
Van den Bossche	Jean	Pilot

Surname	**First Name**	**Role**
Van den Bossche	Robert	Mechanical specialist
Van den Broeck	Wim	Pilot
Van den Hende	Marcel	Onboard mechanic
Van den Meersche	Marcel	Onboard mechanic
Vandepoel	Jean-François	Pilot, CO Detachment
Vandergeten	?	Mechanical specialist
Vandergrieken	?	Pilot, operations officer
Vandermeulen	?	Navigator
Van der Veken	Louis	UDéf
Van de Velde	?	Administration
Van de Ven	Lodewijk	Mechanical specialist
Vandezande	?	Supplies
Vandhelsen	Xavier	Pilot, operations officer
Van Erp	Léon	Onboard mechanic
Vanesse	Fernand	Onboard radio operator
Van Frachem	Florent	Navigator
Van Gompel	Jan	Onboard radio operator
Van Haesendonck	Jean	Pilot
Van Hevele	Walter	Pilot
Van Herreweghe	?	Mechanical specialist
Van Hoenacker	?	Air traffic controller
Van Houdt	August	Onboard radio operator
Van Keymeulen	Raymond	Pilot
Van Laere	Ivo	Pilot
Van Lancker	Charles	Onboard mechanic
Van Loven	Jean	Administration
Van Melkebeke	Sylvain	Mechanics specialist
Vanneuten	Daniel	Pilot
Vanesse	Fernand	Onboard radio operator
Van Ostaede	Liévin	Onboard mechanic
Van Outryve d'Ydewalle	Liévin	Pilot
Van Praet	Etienne	Supplies
Van Rafelghem	Johan	Pilot
Van Roy	Jean	Onboard mechanic
Van Schuylenbergh	K.	Mechanical specialist
Van Straelen	Charles	Pilot
Van Welde	J.	Mechanical specialist
Velghe	Piet	Pilot
Verbist	?	Mechanical specialist
Verbeeck	Roger	Pilot
Vercammen	Urbain	Mechanical specialist
Verdoodt	T.	Mechanical specialist
Verheyden	Florent	UDéf
Verheyden	Gustaaf	Onboard mechanic
Verhoeven	Felix	Pilot, operations officer
Verhulst	Rogier	Radio links specialist

Surname	First Name	Role
Vermeire	Pierre-Sylvère	Pilot
Vermoesen	Pierre	Pilot, operations officer
Verrecke	W.	Pilot
Verschueren	Raoul	Mechanical specialist
Verteneuil	Jean	Onboard radio operator
Vingerhoets	Charles	Pilot
Viseur	Michel	Navigator
Vostanikian	Bahken	Mechanical specialist
Vermaete	Roger	UDéf
Wilgaut	Richard	Onboard mechanic
Willems	Marcel	Onboard mechanic
Williquet	Albert	Navigator
Wouters	Albert	Telecommunications specialist
Wyckaert	Kamiel	Navigator
Werdefroy	Charles	UDéf
Wyns	Francis	Mechanic

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Notes

Chapter 1

1 Used for the filming of John Houston's *The African Queen*.

2 Jacques Brassinne, *L'Assistance Technique belge au Congo juillet 1960 – juin 1968*. Chronique de Politique Étrangère 21, no. 3/4 (1968), pp. 289–518.

3 *Congo, 1963*, *Les Dossiers du CRISP* (INE: Brussels, 1963), p. 116, in *L'Assistance Technique belge au Congo juillet 1960 – juin 1968* p. 395.

4 Brassinne, *L'Assistance Technique* pp. 396–397.

5 Jules Gérard-Libois and Benoit Verhaegen, *Congo 1964: Political Documents of a Developing Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 99.

6 Brassinne, *L'Assistance Technique* p. 398.

7 *Nous en étions, La FATAC, 1964–1967*, Centre de Documentation 15 Wing Transport Aérien and Association Belge des Vétérans et Compagnons de l'Ommegang, 2015, p. 19.

8 *Nous en étions, La FATAC, 1964–1967,* p. 19.

9 *Nous en étions, La FATAC, 1964–1967,* pp. 20–21.

10 *Treasury Reporting Rates of Exchange as of March 31, 1964*, Treasury Department, Bureau of Accounts, Foreign Currency Branch, May 21, 1964, https://wwwgovinfo.gove/content/pkg/GOVPUB-T63.pdf, accessed 8 January 2022.

11 50 Belgian francs = 1 US dollar in 1964

12 *Décédés de mort violente en RDC*, available (in French) at https://www.memoiresducongo.be/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Van-Bost-Un-bilan-provisoire-liste-victimes-europeennes1.pdf, accessed 25 November 2022.

13 A Belgian airline headquartered in Antwerp and Brussels that operated mainly passenger and cargo charters to and from the Congo from 1959 to 1980.

14 Air Brousse was a Congolese airline set up in 1955 by a group of Belgians in 1955. It operated services from Leopoldville and Luluabourg (Kananga) and was taken over by Air Congo in 1967.

15 WIGMO was a CIA front company registered in Lichenstein.

Chapter 2

1 For more information, see Stephen Rookes, *For God and the CIA: Cuban exile Military Operations in the Congo and Beyond, 1959–1967* (Helion & Co: Solihul, 2020).

Chapter 3

1 Janssens was the man who, as a General in July 1960, informed his NCOs that the independence of the Congo changed nothing for the armed forces. See Volume 1.

Chapter 4

None

Chapter 5

1 Adapted from Wilfred De Brouwer, *50 Years Later: The Dramatic Rescue of CIA Officer Richard L. Holm in the Eastern Congo* (Intelligencer: Journal of US Intelligence Studies, Winter 2014–15, pp. 17–21).

About the Authors

Senior Captain Aviator Polydore Stevens was raised in the Belgian Congo. He served with the Belgian Air Force from 1969 to 1993 and during this time he flew several types of aircraft including Mirage V fighter-bomber jets. This experience made him perfect for the role of coordinating the deployment of Belgium's Mirage V aircraft during the Gulf War.

After retiring, Senior Captain Stevens worked for the European Union as an air transport advisor and flew humanitarian missions in several African countries. He has also worked for the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service in Afghanistan and spends his free time researching aviation history. This interest lead him to return to Central Africa in search of the FATAC Piasecki H-21 FG378 which disappeared on 27 June 1965. The wreck was located in 2010. During the search Polydore Stevens came across the story of CIA agent Dick Holm who crashed in a WIGMO flown T-28 and was rescued by the FATAC Piasecki H-21 FG 697 on 25 February 1965 flown by a Belgian crew.

Dr. Stephen Rookes is an author and academic from the UK. He is also a French national. He has written four other books for the Helion @War series and is currently in the process of writing a three-part series on France's war in Indochina.